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SUBLIME THOUGHTS ON MAHABHARATA

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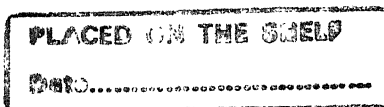
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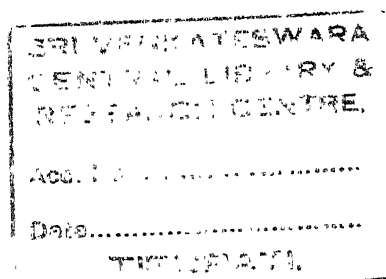
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Guruji, late Shri
A. Venkata Ramaniah Garu, Chairman, Sri Chamun-
deswari Devi Temple, Chitkul, Dist. Medak, A. P.
who inspired me to write this book.



- S. Narayana Rao
(Author of the book)

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FOREWORD

By

Dr. K. M. Krishna Rao, M A ,Ph.D.,
Retd Professor, Bangalore

I am happy to introduce yet another book by my friend, Sri S. Narayan Rao this time on “Sublime Thoughts on Sri Mahabharatham”.

Mahabharata is a great epic composed by God Himself in the name of Sri Vedavyasa who is also called Badarayana, Krishna-Dwaipayana and Vasishtha Krishna, Satyawati sootha, etc. It is an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength. The epic has moulded the characters and civilisation of our sacred land-Bharatavarsh. It is our noblest heritage. It has strengthened our soul. It is well said that everything is found in this epic. That which is not found in it, cannot be found anywhere else. It is called “Panchama Veda”.

Mahabharata teaches us the implications of Dharma and its application to our lives in different stages. We find in it the various doctrines of Dharma. We find in it mentioned important spiritual classics like the great Bhagavad Gita, Vidura Neethi, Yaksha Prasna, Sanat-Sujaateeya, etc. The message of the vedas and upanishads is elaborated with illustrations in the form of anecdotes in the Mahabharata. It is a great work of rules relating to character building and is rightly called an eternal guide to mankind. One can find for himself solutions for all his problems, worldly as well as spiritual. God in the human form (Sri Krishna) has demonstrated to the world how to uphold virtue in this great epic.

Mahabharata is great and vast (Maha and Bharata both). It is a big ocean of innumerable jewels and valuable pearls. One can lift as many pearls as he can and can never exhaust. The present author, Sri S. Narayana Rao, has scholarly picked up one hundred and twenty thoughts from this immortal source which are worthy of study. I am sure it will capture the imagination of the learned people and the youth of the country. Some of the best incidents and morals are depicted and finely narrated here very scholarly and in a lucid and clear way. For example, the magnetic charm and bewitching image of the Lord, desires lead to rebirth, God-the supreme arbiter of destiny, Virtue is man's shield, power of chastity, charity is noblest, evil effects of jealousy, greatness of devotion, adherence to Dharma keeps us happy, do not yield to temptations, influence of attachment, sinful will be punished, God is pleased with the dutiful, philosophic truths in riddles, keep out evil thoughts, justice always triumphs, give up desires to be happy, the lure of wealth and women, Vedic utterances have eternal validity, devotion is the link between God and man, etc.

This book certainly gives an interesting reading and it is to be chewed and digested. I am glad to know that Sri Satyavaram Narayana Rao, is very much busy in his scholarly pursuits after his retirement. He has produced very good and marvellous works which are of high literary standing. I heartily congratulate him on his worthwhile endeavours and great literary achievements. May God bless him with excellent health, wealth and prosperity and long noble life. His wisdom may guide him to achieve still higher achievements. I expect from him many such books from his scholarly and illustrious pen in future also. May the Almighty's choicest blessings be showered on him.

467, V Block,
Rajajinagar,
Bangalore-560 010.
Dated : 12-4-1990.

- Dr. K. M. Krishna Rao
M.A. Ph.D.

Preface

The modern man, under the impact of western civilisation, is crazy about accumulating a variety of goods to make himself happy. Hence, earning more and more money becomes an obsession with him. But the pity is, even after acquiring them, he continues to remain dissatisfied. He does not experience a sense of fulfilment, a feeling of joy. He possesses many things but lacks the most important inward peace and quiet. His mind is always restless.

The habits, values and the life-style of the people have undergone a sea-change in the last two or three generations. Our dwellings are no longer happy homes, filled with spiritual aroma and characterised by elders associating every activity with God and the young ones imbibing that bent of mind from childhood. Those by gone days, no one partook of any thing before it was offered to the Lord. Everything was God's prasad. The entire family remained happy and contented. Those days, the people were not educated in the formal sense but were knowledgeable. They knew what contributed to happiness and peace. Their lives were marked by simple living and high thinking and they shared their belongings with others. But the educated modern man, highly self-centred, has not learnt how to be happy with himself and make others happy. Disappointed and dejected, he visits several places to get relief from stress and pain. All that he

gets is only temporary titillation. One can get peace and happiness only when one turned to God and sought the company of the pious and virtuous. If a person repeatedly listened to the narration of the lives of exalted persons, marked by simplicity and unselfishness, he would be irresistibly attracted to them.

In 1987, I had published “Sublime Thoughts on Srimad Mahabagawatham” in English, with the aid of the T. T. D. Many scholars and learned authors and eminent persons appreciated it very much and desired similar works on Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. from my pen. By God’s grace, I have now completed my book entitled “Sublime Thoughts on Mahabharata in English. It is the result of hard work, assiduous perseverance of three long years. I have put in great and conscientious labour in preparing this volume. If encouraged on this venture, I propose to write ‘Sublime Thoughts on Ramayana’ etc. on similar lines. I have rendered this humble service to the English-knowing public which has neither the time nor the ability to read the original text in sanskrit. I hope, these Sublime Thoughts on Mahabharata, presented by me, would surely capture the imagination of the readers. Here, I have narrated and selected the best incidents and morals from the Mahabharata, conveyed to the modern readers in an attractive method and simple but lucid style. The language is very simple and direct. The readers will have close and intimate glimpses of the stupendous drama which was enacted in the Kurukshetra battle field, years ago. The selected incidents of the epic are portrayed here very dramatically, mixed with great moral lessons, elucidating and explaining them vividly. I have, by all means, retained the spirit of the epic. In all the anecdotes, dramatic significance is retained.

If, after reading my book, I hope, a few at least would read the epic in the original, my desire would be fulfilled. My book is just a guide into the Vast ocean called Mahabharata. This is just an humble effort, on my behalf, to acquaint

readers with some of the sublime eternal truths and
orals drawn from this great treasure-house of such truths.
ere are ever so many of such sublime truths and dictums
asured in this work. But I have picked up only some of them
d have tried to introduce them with interpretation. It is
ally a useful attempt to understand this great work to some
tent. I have made earnest attempt to make the rendering
niently readable and enjoyable. I thank sincerely Dr.
M. Krishna Rao, Retired Professor, Bangalore, for his
luable and worthy "foreword" readily sent painstakingly.
am also grateful to the T.T.D. Authorities for their finan-
l assistance and encouragement.

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C O N T E N T S

I. Foreward	iii
II. Preface	v
III. Introduction	xiii
<i>Sublime Thoughts</i>	
1. How magnetic is the Lord's Charm	1
2. Destiny cannot be altered	2
3. The Bewitching Image of Lord	3
4. Misdeeds of person are bound to recoil	3
5. Desires Lead to Rebirth	4
6. Spiritual injunctions will discipline mind	5
7. Divine sanction essential for Success	6
8. Proudest Moment For A Teacher	7
9. Need to Avoid Evil-Doers	8
10. Men are but tools in God's hands	9
11. God Supreme Arbiter of Destiny	10
12. All things are possible with divine support	11
13. Virtuous conduct is Man's Shield	12
14. Divine Sanction alone can ensure success	13
15. Composure in the wake of Adversity	14
16. How to avoid sin and reach God	15
17. Epic women and power of chastity	16
18. No act is nobler than being Charitable	17

19. Humility takes devotee nearer to God	18
20. God Stays with the Righteous	19
21. Faith in God as Supreme Being	20
22. The evil effects of Jealousy	22
23. God will rush to devotee's rescue	23
24. Forgiveness marks great souls	24
25. Devotion should be a continuous process	25
26. Selfless actions help realise Absolute Reality	25
27. Do your duty, Leave result to God	26
28. Salvation has to be earned by a devotee	27
29. Fate's decree is unalterable	28
30. Duties include Spiritual austerities	29
31. Why a dip in holy rivers is essential	30
32. Religious recipes for keeping the mind pure	31
33. The quintessence of true devotion	33
34. Adherence to Dharma keeps a man happy	34
35. Crime to waste the Golden opportunity	34
36. Evil forces will be ultimately crushed	35
37. Influence of attachment	36
38. Yield not to temptations	37
39. Need to train children properly	38
40. Chief aim of Yagams	39
41. The Simplest formula for comfort	40
42. Devotion takes human beings near God	41
43. How Power and wealth should be used	42
44. Happiness is an attitude of Mind	43
45. Nine steps to External Bliss	43
46. Gratitude is a cardinal virtue	44
47. None can escape penalty for sins	45

48. No barrier of formality between two-friends	46
49. Self-Surrender : Vital for God-realisation	47
50. Patience does not mean docility	48
51. Family attachments blur one's vision	49
52. Nemesis certain to strike the arrogant	49
53. Devotion to God, a basic instinct	50
54. Hypocrisy Shrouded by "Dharma"	51
55. Bear the Burden with a Smile	52
56. Performance of duties pleases God	53
57. All duties are good to the unattached	54
58. Prime requisites of a devotee	55
59. How the virtuous also commit Sins	56
60. Infinite compassion of the Almighty	57
61. Philosophic truths in a riddle	58
62. Pious men always come out triumphantly	59
63. Special prayers that bring rain	60
64. Advice against giving way to anguish	61
65. How to keep out evil thoughts	62
66. Moral law should not be violated	63
67. Egotism deadly foe of the great	64
68. God stands by the righteous	64
69. Upholder of Virtue, a true devotee	66
70. The aim of having children	67
71. Problems that face righteous men	67
72. The role of a family man	68
73. Adherence to code of Dharma	69
74. Virtue always triumphs	70
75. Effective ways to avoid sinful acts	71
76. The wisdom of elders	71

77. Everything is possible with divine help	72
78. Process of evolution into divine being	73
79. God will never fail those seeking shelter	74
80. Need to adhere to truth and justice	75
81. Magnanimity of the Learned	76
82. The wise distinguish body from soul	77
83. Justice always triumphs	78
84. Happy is one who gives up desires	79
85. Significance of 'Swadharma'.	80
86. Remember Him at the hour of need	81
87. Devotion will help solve birth's mystery	82
88. Futile to resist Divine will	83
89. Why even the wise suffer	84
90. Righteous men win Laurels	85
91. Patient Striving will fetch Divine bliss	85
92. Zealous guardians of culture and religion	86
93. Ruminating over past adversities not advisable	87
94. No Sanction to amend Shastras	88
95. Justice should be even-handed	89
96. The lure of money and women	89
97. Inexorability of Fate	90
98. The most precious jewel of women	91
99. Vedic utterance have eternal validity	92
100. Devotion, the link between God and man	93
101. Law of Dharma makes no distinction	94
102. Righteousness must be upheld at all costs	95
103. Ultimate triumph of Justice	96
104. Magnificence of Bheeshma's sacrifice	97
105. Path of morality sure way to realise God	98

106.	Virtuous guest deserves worship	99
107.	One should be sincere in performing duty	100
108.	None can conquer destiny	101
109.	In faith lies success in the battle of life	102
110.	Kunti's devotion to Krishna	103
111.	Selfless service has its reward	104
112.	Magnanimity towards poor	104
113.	Man should turn a child to be near God	105
114.	The seed of divinity	106
115.	God always protects the virtuous	107
116.	A golden rule on charity	108
117.	The intellect should not be misused	109
118.	The truly great never look down on the weak	110
119.	Prosperity where the righteous live	111
120.	Sorrow and happiness integral parts	112

INTRODUCTION

The Mahabharat, with its 1,25,000 verses, covers a variety of doctrines hidden in the Vedas. It is not a mere telling of tales. Man today feels despondent over the trend of events and often regrets why he was born. The purpose of creation is something beyond human comprehension as it is God's play. This great epic describes elaborately the origin of the illustrious Lunar race, from which hailed Bharata, after whom this country has taken its name. Vyasa, the author of the poem, is also the source from whom the chief characters of this drama sprang. A study of this monumental work will cleanse one's heart and remove all sin.

The Mahabharat was recited in the Sarpayajnam performed by Janamejaya (great grandson of the Pandavas) to wipe out the entire serpent population as a revenge for one of them having bitten his father (Parishit King). As the mantras were chanted, snakes flung themselves into the blazing flames. The penance was, however, stopped in time by the intervention of the sage, Asthika. The related verse, recited daily with faith, will ensure freedom from the bite of reptile. Also, at the commencement of the story, the im-

portance of Sandhyavandanam is highlighted in the sage Jaratkaru episode.

Centuries ago, it was proclaimed that "what is not in the Mahabharata, is nowhere". After twenty five centuries, we can say the same thing about it even now. He, who does not know Mahabharata, knows not life, its beauty, its style, its trials, its tragedy and its grandeur. It is not a mere epic. It is also a romance, a tale of heroic men, and women and of some who were divine, a whole literature, a whole code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations and of speculative thought, with its core of the Gita, the noblest of the scriptures and the grandest saga working upto the Apocalypse in the eleventh chapter. It is the best literature of India, ancient and modern, and should be brought into a common pool, easily accessible to all, through all the languages of India. The world, in all its sordidity, was too much around us. Nothing will lift, inspire and uplift as beauty and aspiration learnt through such books. One may tour all over India and see all things but one cannot understand India's "way of life" unless one has read Mahabharata and Ramayana, at least, in a good translation.

Hindu tradition accepts a number of "incarnations" of the Lord. To redress imbalance between justice and injustice, to punish the wicked and protect the good, the Lord manifests Himself as a Supreme person and shows the way. Among different such incarnations of the Lord, that of Veda Vyasa is an intellectual one. The Lord in this form, classified the Vedas into four and made it available for the devotees to know the meaning. Besides this, Vyasa out of great compassion for the lay public who could not read the Vedas, wrote the great epic Mahabharata running into 1,25,000 Verses. This classical epic is a Veritable "hold all" of Indian culture.

It contains all that can be said about the four-fold aspirations of man—wealth, desires, dharma and moksha.

What is not found in this epic, is not found elsewhere. What is not found anywhere is found here. "The epic is a huge electrical field with high-powered incandescent bulbs. For example, it contains the Vidura neethi, Yaksha Prasna, Sanat Sujateeyam, Bhagawad Gita. Vishnu Sahasranama, Discourses on politics and sociology and administration in the Shanti Parva. The epic is a treasure house for all who want to live a sane life.

Veda Vyasa is known by different names, like Baada-raayana and Krishna Dwaipayana. He has given us a great book of aphorisms, called the Brahma Sutras. They constitute the spiritual dictionary for understanding the Upanishads. Veda Vyasa is adored by all on the Ashadha Pournami day, today when sanyasins conduct the Vyasa Puja to mark their Chaturmasya and pay their homage to Him. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Indian philosophy and culture minus Veda Vyasa is zero.

The realities are idealised by genius and given the form that makes the drama, poetry or great prose. Since literature is closely related to life, so long as the human family is divided into nations, literature cannot escape the effects of such division. But the highest literature transcends regionalism and through it, when we are properly attuned we realise the essential oneness of the human family.

The Mahabharata is of this class. It belongs to the world and not only to India. To the people of India, indeed, this epic has been an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength. Learnt at the mother's knee with reverence and love it has inspired great men to heroic deeds as well as enabled the humble to face their trials with fortitude and faith.

The Mahabharata was composed many thousand years ago. But generations of gifted reciters have added to Vyasa's

original a great mass of accretions. All the floating literature that was thought to be worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical, of nearly thirty Centuries, found a place in it. In those days, when there was no printing, interpolation in a recognised classic seemed to correspond to inclusion in the National library. Divested with these accretions, the Mahabharata is a noble poem possessing in a supreme degree the characteristic of a true epic, great and fateful movement, heroic characters and stately diction. The characters in the epic move with the vitality of real life. It is difficult to find anywhere such vivid portraiture on so ample a canvas. Bhishma, the perfect knight, the Venerable Drona, the valiant but chivalrous Karna, Duryodhana whose perverse pride is redeemed by great courage in adversity, the high-souled Pandavas with God-like strength as well as power of suffering. Draupadi, most unfortunate of queens, Kunti, the worthy mother of heroes, Gandhari, the devoted wife and sad mother of the wicked sons of Dhritarashtra—there are some of the immortal figures on that crowded but never confused canvas. Then there is great Krishna himself, most energetic of men whose divinity scintillates through a cloud of very human characteristics. His high purposefulness pervades the whole epic. One can read even a translation and feel the overwhelming power of the incomparable vastness and sublimity of the poem.

In the world of classical literature the Mahabharata is unique in many respects. As an epic, it is the greatest—seven times as great as the Odyssey combined and the grandest—animating the heart of India over two thousand years past and destined to lead humanity for thousands of years in future. It is the mightiest single endeavour of literary creation of any culture in human history. The effort to conceive the mind that conceived it is itself a liberal education and a walk through its table of contents is more than a Sabbath-day Journey.

The Mahabharata discloses a rich civilisation and a

highly evolved society which though of an older world strangely resembles the India of our own times with the same values and ideals. India was divided into a number of independent kingdoms. Occasionally one king more distinguished or ambitious than the rest would assume the title of emperor securing the acquiescence of other royalities and signalised it by a great sacrificial feast. The adherence was generally voluntary. The assumption of imperial title conferred no overlordship. The emperor was only first among his peers. The art of war was highly developed and military prowess and skill were held in high esteem. We read in the Mahabharata of standardised phalanxes and of various tactical movements. There was an accepted code of honourable warfare, deviations from which met with reproof among Kshatriyas. The advent of the Kali age is marked by many breaches of these conventions in the Kurukshetra battle on account of the bitterness of conflict, frustration and bereavements. Some of the most impressive passages in the epic centre round these breaches of dharma.

The population lived in cities and villages. The cities were the headquarters of the kings and their household and staff. There were beautiful palaces and gardens and the lives led were cultured and luxurious. There was trade in the cities, but the mass of the people were agriculturists.

Besides this urban and rural life, there was a very highly cultured life in the seclusion of forest recesses centred round ascetic teachers. These ashramas kept alive the bright fires of learning and spiritual thought. Young men of noble birth eagerly sought education at these ashramas. World-weary aged went there for peace. These centres of culture were cherished by the rulers of the land and not the proudest of them would dare to treat the members of the hermitages otherwise than with respect and consideration.

Women were highly honoured and entered largely in the lives of their husbands and sons. The caste system pre-

veiled, but intercaste marriages were not unknown. Some of the greatest warriors in the Mahabharata were Brahmans

The Mahabharata has moulded the character & civilisation of one of the most numerous of the world's people. How did it fulfil—how is it still continuing to fulfil—this function? By its gospel of Dharma, which like a golden thread runs through all the complex movements in the epic; but its lesson is that hatred breeds hatred, that covetousness and violence lead inevitably to ruin, that the only real conquest is in the battle against one's lower nature.

Indeed the Mahabharata has another name known among scholars—Jaya—which means Victory, conveying the moral herein indicated. 'Jaya' is the name by which the work is referred to in the first invocatory verse of the epic. If a foreigner reads this book—translation and epitome though it is—and closes it with a feeling that he has read a good and elevating work, he may be confident that he has grasped the spirit of India and can understand her people—high and low, rich and poor.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the persons and the incidents portrayed in the great literature of a people influence national character no less potently than the actual heroes and events enshrined in its history. It may be claimed that the former play an even more important part in the formation of ideals, which give to character its impulse of growth. Since literature is so vitally related to life and character, it follows that so long as the human family remains divided into nations, the persons and events of one national literature have not an equal appeal to all, because they do not awaken the same associations. A word or phrase about Hanuman, Bheema, Arjuna, Bharata, or Sita, conveys to us in India, learned and illiterate alike, a significance all its own, of which an English rendering cannot convey even a fraction to outsiders, however interested in Indian mythology and folklore.

In the moving history of our land, from time immemorial, great minds have been formed and nourished and touched to heroic deeds by the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In most Indian homes, children formerly learnt these immortal stories as they learnt their mother-tongue—at the mother's knee. The sweetness and sorrows of Sita and Draupadi, the heroic fortitude of Rama and Arjuna and the loving fidelity of Lakshmana and Hanuman became the stuff of their young Philosophy of life. The growing complexity of life has changed the simple pattern of early home life. Still there are few in our land who do not know the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, though the stories come to them so embroidered with the garish fancies of the Kalakshepam (a devotional meeting wherein an expert scholar and singer tells a story to his audience) and the cinema as to retain but little of the dignity and exactness to truth of Vyasa or Valmiki.

Vyasa's Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages and to hear it faithfully told is to love it and come under its elevating influence. It strengthens the soul and drives home the vanity of ambition and evil & futility of anger & hatred. Children hear these stories of our heroes and heroines very interestingly and think them like Gods of our motherland. It came to be written by Ganapati to the dictation of Vyasa. It was before the days of printing, when the memory of the learned was the sole repository of books. Vyasa first taught the great epic to his son, the sage Shuka. Later, he expounded it to many other disciples. Were it not so, the book might have been lost to future generations. Tradition has it that Narada told the story of the Mahabharata to the devas while Shuka taught it to the gandharvas, the rakshasas and the Yakshas. The virtuous and learned Vaishampayana, one of the chief disciples of Vyasa, the son of the great king Parikshit, conducted a great sacrifice, during which he narrated the story. Later on Suta Maharishi recited this in the Naimisa forest to an assembly of sages of which Saunaka was the leader. It was meant to teach humanity dharma and other ends of life. It is the ancient and wonderful epic of

our land. It has many illustrative tales and sublime teachings, besides the narrative of the fortunes of the Pandavas. It is in fact a veritable ocean containing countless pearls and gems. It is with the Ramayana, a living fountain of the ethics and culture of our motherland.

The Mahabharata is also known as Panchama Veda, the fifth Veda. It was specially written by Sri Vedavyasa in order to make the sublime knowledge of the four Vedas available to the common folks. Few books have ever exerted such profound influence on the minds of men as the Mahabharata. This immortal epic is unique in every way. It gives an account of persons with different qualities, maxims for right conduct and indicates the ways to realise God. It is a full treatise on the science of society giving portraits, customs, heroic deeds of persons and contains a picture of universal movement, light and shades. It confirms the truth that sin and sinfulness are certain to be destroyed and even good souls, if they associate with these. Philosophy seldom appeals to the mind. But in Mahabharata, even the most obtruse philosophic truths are put across by means of stories and legends. This is the secret of its popularity among all classes of people. We find priceless teachings in this. It awakens in our young men and women, an awareness of our rich moral heritage and lifts them from the dropping faith in Values. Reading it is liberal and religious education. It has excellent readability.

It is the largest literary work ever composed in the annals of the world. It is the most important landmark in the cultural evolution of mankind and the biggest heritage which ancient India has bequeathed to the succeeding generations. Bhagavad Gita is a part and parcel of this epic. The Mahabharata together with its innumerable parables and fables, episodes and anecdotes has propounded a theory of philosophical Relativity, harmonising the secular and the spiritual into a synthesis and symphony wherein the parameters and paradoxes, contradictions and conflicts of life lose

their static connotations to acquire a dynamic concord and concomitance. All the concepts including truth and non-violence, justice and fairplay, crime and punishment, good and evil, right and wrong, are clearly viewed by it. The intellectual majesty of the Mahabharata, depicting the eternal drama of human existence, with all its ironies and intricacies, complexities and cadences, mysteries and melodies, subtleties and susceptibilities, psychological heights and emotional depths, is equally unrivalled in the entire range of world literature. Bharat is the traditional name of India—in legend and literature from times immemorial. The Mahabharata is the National Epic of India. The Bharatas are mentioned as a race of brave warriors inhabiting the region lying between the Yamuna and the Ganges in Vedic literature (as confirmed in the Rig Veda). It is the largest work ever written in any language in the world. It comprises of eighteen volumes called the Parvas and contains about one lakh verses of four lines each. Sri M. Williams once said "In Indian—literature, like the face of nature, is on a gigantic scale". Vedas are termed as Sruti, meaning what has been heard. The Vedic compositions were called the hymns. The hymns—the Vedic Riks were considered to be too holy to be recorded and the Vedas were communicated from generation to generation by word of the mouth. All the four Vedas, the Rig-Veda, Yajurveda, Sama-Veda and Atherva Veda, have original text the mantra portions besides the commentary portions, called Brahmana Portions. Those which interpret the philosophical content, are called the Upanishads. They are styled as (Veda + Anta) Vedanta, the end of the Vedas, i.e., the consummation of knowledge, that is, pure knowledge.

The great personality who undertook the responsibility of coordination and codification of the Vedic literature was the Krishna Dwaipayana, the son of the Vedic Rishi, Parasara.

Mahabharata is an encyclopaedia of Dharma. It is essentially a source of Hindu ethics, politics and religion

and sociology. It is not a mere story of two cousins of a single clan at war. It has all that one has to know about the four-fold aspirations of men—Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

The Mahabharata gives us the implications and the ramifications of the concept of Dharma and its application to the lives of men and women in their different stages. Dharma is the golden word within whose confines the epic has packed its myriads doctrines. It is studded with important spiritual classics,—the Gita, Vidura Neethi, and Yaksha Prasna. That is the reason, why it is called the fifth Veda. When celestials weighed in the two pans of a balance—the epic in one and other scriptures in the other, the pointer tilted in favour of the former. The credit for the glorious contribution went to Veda Vyasa, who compiled the spiritual dictionary—Brahmasutras to help in coordinating the passages in the Vedas and interpret them in a consistent way.

Veda Vyasa is an intellectual manifestation of Lord Vishnu. The prime purpose of his avatara was to lay open before an aspirant, the spiritual lore of Hindu religion, a code of conduct and the path to attain God's feet. As he stayed for long, teaching the Vedas under the Badari Tree, he was also known as Badarayana. Besides codifying the Vedas to enable laymen understand the philosophical truths and morals, the author of the Mahabharata had composed (18) Puranas. Here its magic of human interest and spiritual profundity has been brought out clearly. For the last many years, it has held me in thrall. There are more characters in it and its story also is very complicated.

Nothing can be more inspiring, lofty or Sublime than the thoughts continued in the upanishads. The intention of the sages was to breathe into their holy utterances, all that is auspicious for humanity. These statements focus the attention of the people on the existence of God. They voice the mortal experience of the compassion of the Almighty.

The message of the Upanishads is elaborated and suitably presented in the form of anecdotes in the Mahabharata. It is the main reason that it is called "The Fifth Veda". The four Vedas contain all the tenets of Hinduism. It expounds the aphorisms in the Vedas and the Upanishads, in particular, through the Bhagawad Gita.

Like each node of a sugarcane, which because of the high concentration of juice, is extremely tasty, every one of the 18 Parvas (chapters) of this epic is note worthy for the ideals and sentiments it expresses. Sri Madhwacharya has written a commentary on it—"the Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya". There is constant tussle between virtue and vice and always the former triumphs, though in the process, it has to withstand severe shocks and undergo many trials. If Yudhistira can be compared to the tree of "Dharma", its trunk was Arjuna, its branches and leaves Bheema, Nakula the flowers and Sahadeva, the fruits, the main root was Lord Krishna, guiding them at every stage and making them uphold Righteousness. The tree grew profusely, watered by the chastity and Bhakthi of Draupadi. By the side of this tree, was the poisonous one, symbolising the Kauravas—Duryodhana being the main tree, known for his evil intentions, Karna its trunk, Shakuni the branches and leaves, while Dussasana stood for the fruits. Against Lord Krishna, the blind king Dhritarashtra was its main root, representing attachment. Mahabharata reveals how God comes to the rescue of sincere devotee—, who pin their hope and faith on Him—example : Draupadi's call and Sri Krishna's immediate response. Such is the story of Mahabharata, rightly called—the fifth Veda. It is an encyclopaedia of rules relating to character building and an eternal guide to mankind.

Tossed in the cross-currents of family life and unable to bear its complexities, an individual experiences in explicable mental anguish and is in constant quest of some panacea to obtain mental equanimity. The mighty epic presents morals contained in the Vedic texts, in a narrative form. By

a critical study and comparison of the two rival groups, one symbolising the wicked and the other nobility, who make the dramatical persons. One can draw lessons to avoid pitfalls and face the onslaughts by evil elements. Thus it serves as a protective armour for devoted persons. While in the Ramayana, God in the human form demonstrated how to uphold virtue, in the Mahabharata, as Sri Krishna, He highlights the value of righteous living. In the former, the Divine Mother chose to undergo suffering for sake of humanity, while in the latter, the Lord saved the Pandavas from innumerable perils and even went as their envoy on a peace mission. Janamejaya was about to destroy the entire snake population by making them fall in his sacrificial fire when further catastrophe was prevented by a sage, At this stage, the Mahabharata, written by Sri Vyasa, was recited. Every creation of God has a purpose and by ordering the reptiles to glide away at the very approach of human beings, one is taught that by keeping himself aloof without getting involved in worldly events, he can remain unruffled.

S. NARAYANA RAO

Author



“Sublime Thoughts on Mahabharatam”

1. How Magnetic is the Lord's Charm !

God can never be defined by anyone. In stray instances, a few may seem to succeed in deliberately flouting divine laws but their misdeeds will be shortlived. God is never partial, although He assumes protection of devotees who have entrusted themselves to His total care. God's prime concern is to reform even the renegade, retribution being His last resort.

With power and pelf at their command, some may threaten or compel others, mainly dependent on them, to subscribe to their views or acquiesce in their mad Ventures. Even people, who, more out of fear, are submissive to men in authority disregard the commands in certain circumstances. The Mahabharatam portrays how the turbulent Duryodhana, unable to reconcile himself to Sri Krishna's mission seeking peace terms, ordered his associates not to show respect to the Lord when He enters the palace hall pleading for the Pandavas. But all his stringent instructions were ignored since everyone spontaneously stood up in utter reverence, as God-incarnate, with his effulgence, majesty and magnetic charm, made His entry. Even Karna, who had supported Duryodhana, bemoaned his lot that he had to abide him due to circumstances beyond control. Just think of the arrogance displayed by the Kaurava chief and refer to his conceited words that the peace parleys indicated the

mind is warped and is steeped in hatred and enmity and who have a fixed notion, is a waste. The Lord was not unaware of this but yet He chose to act as an envoy, with a purpose. Preaching ethics to men who refuse to see reason is an exercise in futility. The talks having failed, war between the two groups became un-avoidable.

2. Destiny can not be altered

Every act of a human being is governed by two factors –the consequences of his noble gestures as well as his senses and crimes in the previous life. The effects of those good or bad or wicked deeds operate in the form of fate at the appropriate time. To some extent, a person can use his intelligence and try to solve the problems he faces but he must remember that there is an invisible force that guides him. Even the ability to assess the issues correctly is but a gift of that Supreme Power and if realising this, he entrusts himself to the Almighty, he can succeed in life. Help in times of distress will be forthcoming in some form or the other. But if destiny wills otherwise, even the most carefully planned scheme will fail. If fate favours him, he will be lucky in arriving at the solution without any effort. Even men known for their integrity, are at times, found to do the most injudicious act. On the contrary, who do not put in any hard work, are often found to enjoy comforts. Fate's decision can not be altered, as could be seen from the Ramayana, where Sri Rama, known for His sobriety chased the golden fawn, although Lakshmana warned Him not to do so. The result was Sri Sita's abduction.

It was destiny that made Yudhishtira accept Duryodhana's invitation to a game of dice although his brothers had vehemently argued and pleaded with him to reject it as they smelt something sinister behind it. Yudhishtira, an authority on scriptures and the embodiment of righteousness, ought to have known that gambling should be abhorred but yet he was drawn into the dragnet, as fate had over-powered his thinking capacity.

3. The Bewitching Image of Lord

In the absence of any chance to witness God in flesh and blood, the consecrated idols in temples provide us an opportunity to get an idea of His real form, gaily decorated with Jewels and flowers. Worshipping the same and retaining this form in one's mind, one can gradually develop, through a process of intense meditation, a deep yearning to realise the Supreme Being. What distinguishes God is His charm and His bewitching smile with which He disarms even His opponents and hypnotises everyone. The faculties given by God to a human being should hence be utilised to pay his obeisance and feast on His personality. As one saint said, if the hands, for instance, are not used to place a few flowers at the feet of the idols, they are perhaps fit to be chopped into bits and thrown to the vultures. Temples are hence, to be preserved as havens of peace and not as a place for gossip. It was this infectious smile of Lord Krishna that mesmerised all the citizens of Hastinapura and they could feel the electrifying effect within themselves. They vied with each other to have a glimpse of Lord Krishna and enshrine the majestic image in their minds. Despite Duryodhana's arrangements, He chose to spend the night with Vidura because the former's intention was to display his pomp and power while the latter was the embodiment of humility and His affection was genuine.

The Lord pleaded with Dhitarashtra about the legitimate demand of the Pandavas but Duryodhana refused to part with even a square inch of the territory. The alternative was that the issue was left to be settled in the battle of Kurukshetra.

4. Misdeeds of person are bound to recoil

The misdeeds a person commits are bound to recoil on him, though one cannot say when. The fact that his sinister designs are crowned with success for a period need not delude him into thinking that the passage will be smooth for ever.

When destiny strikes and he is made to pay for all his sinful acts, he will have nobody except himself to blame for his plight. As Duryodhana lay wounded on the battlefield, Sri Krishna presented Himself before him and ignoring his unrepenting talk, told him plainly the ignominious end he had met with was a fitting reward for his atrocities. In deference to the request, Duryodhana, had made during His visit to Hastinapura, the Lord granted him heavenly status worthy of a warrior, though he told him, he did not deserve it. Entrusted with the delicate task of consoling Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, who had been bereaved of their sons, Sri Krishna said it was the curse Duryodhana had earned by his sins against Draupadi & noble souls which caused the catastrophe. Knowledgeable that she was, Gandhari told Sri Krishna "why blame anybody? Everything was your own plan."

Yudhishtira was stricken with grief over the havoc caused by the war & declined to ascend the throne. No argument by his own brothers or Sage Vyasa could convince him. It was given to Sri Krishna again to persuade him to assume Kingship, just as He did to make Arjuna get over the sense of gloom and fight earlier.

5. Desires lead to Rebirth

Rebirth is the direct result of an individual's desires which breed with tremendous rapidity. Where they remained unfulfilled, frustration sets in and a person indulges in misdeeds to achieve what he wants. What is more dangerous is avarice and one's eagerness to amass wealth in the quickest time possible. The consequences of these desires ought to be experienced and hence a person is caused to be born. The greedy Duryodhana could have saved himself had he just parted with just five villages from out of a huge territory. He refused and within a brief time thereafter, he lost his life. Pinpointing its disastrous influence, a saint of South India in his hymn, says that desires as incurable diseases. God manifests out of His free will to save humanity.

In a story, it is told that a rich man sleeping in his

room comfortably. A prisoner spends his night in his cell. sleep is common to both of them. Excepting in size and decorations, both the rooms have four walls. In the case of the former, the door has a catch inside enabling him to go out whenever he likes. But the jail is always bolted from outside. In the same manner, God imprisons the individual soul in a body, each according to the nature and magnitude of his misdeeds, and releases it only at the opportune time. God, like the wealthy man, can assume any form when He chooses. Hence His is not a birth in its strict sense. He does not get Himself involved in the cycle of birth and death.

6. Spiritual injunctions will discipline mind

To preserve harmony among the people and to promote concord, inspired sages of ancient days, contributed simplified religious literature, highlighting the four stages in the evolution of human life, analogous to the four seasons. They gave prime importance to obedience to spiritual injunctions, believing that it would lead to development of mental discipline. The sages wanted moral law respects at all costs. The rules of conduct were so formed as to bring all classes under their sphere. Restraint and freedom from desire were the basic features of the codes prescribed by them. The Mahabharata was written to present a true picture of human society and to project the theme that the righteous will certainly be redeemed by God while those who flout time-tested values will be wiped out. The scriptural texts prove how those who took to the road to religion were pious and just and that who ignored the teachings became victims of lust, greed and anger and ultimately perished.

From the portrayal of different characters in the Mahabharata, it could be seen that those trained in using the God-given intellect properly and those who exercise the faculty of thinking judiciously, will definitely prosper. The mind, like the body, required to be disciplined. The epic of Mahabharata was a product of necessity to meet the circumstances

left the world without rulers and there was chaos in the absence of cementing factors. Even men of piety were disdained, jealousy and pride ruled those who tried to take over the administration. The poem was written in this context and Vyasa's message was "where there is righteousness there shall be victory."

7. Divine Sanction essential for success

Greed breeds frustration resulting in self-destruction. Where a person fails to get his desires fulfilled, he turns angry and hates others. There is no bar on any one having ambitions to obtain certain worldly comforts but what is to be despised is the craze to possess excess of wealth at the cost of others. If the same eagerness is diverted towards realisation of God, a person will feel contented. This is the chief message of Mahabharata which also highlights the significance of maintaining family cohesion and unity among brothers.

The Mahabharata stresses that any amount of sagacity shown by an individual in his planning for the future, will avail, if it has not obtained the sanction of God. Very often it is seen that those who execute a scheme with faith in the Almighty succeed effortlessly. By the episode of Nahusha the epic projects the disaster that one may face, if he yields to temptations and the influence of the senses. A King who did not want any material comforts and benefits, but performed a penance to occupy the throne of Indra, gave room to lust in a moment of weakness and was sent back to the world.

The morals contained in Vyasa's immortal text, have relevance even now. The advancement in science and technology is rooted in faith of the Almighty. The Sun, the Moon and other elements of nature function not at the command of human beings, but at the behest of unseen Supreme Power. Vyasa shows in the epic, not only how righteousness triumphs over evil, but also the ways in which Lord Krishna,

God Incarnate, frequently gave His guidance to noble souls. The success of Yudhishtira, after his crusade against wicked people is being celebrated even now as a festival.

8. Proudest Moment For A Teacher

Professional jealousy may often spur a person to indulge in demeaning acts. The proudest moment for a teacher is to witness his pupils distinguish themselves in life and reach even dizzy heights in lucrative jobs. But the delight he derives will be in respect of avocations other than his own only. By some chance, if a pupil chooses to enter his (teaching) profession, proves a shade better and is acknowledged as an outstanding member, the lurking-jealousy in him will intensify. This rivalry is nothing uncommon and is but a natural tendency among human beings.

Mahabharata projects this (a man's failing) through Dronacharya. Born in a high caste, he should have been a master of scriptures, but throughout his life, he was destined to serve Kings. (In Ramayana also, King Kousika, by virtue of his penance, turned as Sage Vishwamitra). Dronacharya acclaimed Arjuna as the best among his students in archery. The same expert contravened the rules of just-warfare and injured Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, from behind. Surrounded by mighty warriors, Abhimanyu put up a very brave fight but, seeing him sagging, Duryodhana deputed his son, to finish him off. Anticipating his attack from the movements of his shadow, Abhimanyu sprang a surprise and killed him. Dronacharya was deeply hurt that this should have happened when he was in over-all command of the army. Envious of the prowess of the Youth, son of his disciple, he severed Abhimanyu's hand, although his conscience pricked him. Seeing his hesitation, Duryodhana Commanded Jayadratha to fell Abhimanyu.

Abhimanyu's glorious end served to remind us of fate's inviolability. His father had asked him to guard Yudhishtira in view of the attempt to kidnap him when left

alone. But Yudhishtira obsessed by inferiority complex that a lad should protect him, asked Abhimanyu to break the special troop formation. Lest he should be mistaken for a coward, he obeyed, though reluctantly, but calamity overtook him. Yudhishtira's verse, wishing him success, annotated from a different angle, appeared to be a parting epitaph.

9. Need to Avoid Evil-Doers

Nothing will be more foolish than to associate oneself with confirmed evil-doers and unscrupulous elements. If by chance, one happens to make their acquaintance, the moment their real character is discovered, it should be one's endeavour to have all the ties with them totally snapped, as otherwise it will be impossible to wriggle out of their clutches later. Even at the stage of a sapling, if one notices a thorn, it should be uprooted. Allowed to grow into a tree, it will prove a menace and cause injury to the very person who tended it. It will be equally unwise to repose confidence in those who are known for their misdeeds. But if on the other hand, after a deep probe, if two persons agree to remain together as true friends. It will be absolutely necessary to have mutual trust, instead of harbouring suspicion. Two friends should never fight over petty differences. At the same time, if two opponents, known for their divergent views, keep reticent for some time, one must smell that a deep plan is hatched to overthrow each other. Caution should be exercised in dealing with such enemies. These were the words of same counsel which Bheema and Arjuna administered to their eldest brother, Yudhishtira, when he sought their advice about accepting an invitation from their cousin, Duryodhana, to visit his capital to inspect a mandapam, specially raised by him. Nakula was in complete agreement with the two brothers while Sahadeva plainly told him that the manner in which Duryodhana invited him indicated that destiny had started knocking at his doors and hence uttered a suitable warning. Nothing but jealousy made Duryodhana decide to deprive his cousins (Pandavas) of their wealth. Aware that this could not be done by an open declaration of

ar, with his uncle Sakuni's guidance, Duryodhana thought of luring Yudhishthira to play a game of dice and defeating him. The voice that raised itself against this cunning and malicious scheme was that of Vidura but he was branded as a traitor and was virtually called names.

1. Men are but tools in God's hands

Every human being is entitled to use his intellect and carry out the tasks assigned to him to the best of his ability. But he should remember that this extraordinary capacity to think, reason and act judiciously is but a gift of the invisible power. Hence he should not concern himself with the result, which may turn out according to his expectations or contrary to what he had planned. A firm believer in God will be conscious of the fact that he has no control over events which have happened or those to take place. A rationalist on the other hand, feels that he can by his wisdom hope to achieve success relying entirely on his personal endeavour ridiculing those—who speak of divine sanction, but he too, at one stage, is bound to understand that he is but a tool in God's hands.

Getting himself deeply involved in administrative affairs, Drona who ought to have preached religion by virtue of his scholarship, took to archery teaching to the princes. At the time when he was causing widespread destruction to the Pandava army in the Kurukshetra war, sages reminded him of his legitimate duty and how he had slipped from the path chalked out for him. This kindled the dormant feelings within him, which made him enter into a mood of self-introspection and he then prepared himself to receive God's judgment. This is the attitude of a Vedanti, who entrusts himself to God and functions without the least concern for the fruits of his action.

Lord Krishna devised a plan to outwit Drona and asked Yudhishthira to utter a statement amounting to a falsehood, which naturally provoked his protest. A lie could be justified if it would not injure the sentiments of any one

and if it proved beneficial to somebody and Yudhishtira was forced to do it. With all the evil elements like Duryodhana, Dussasana and a host of others duly punished for their misdeeds, under the benign guidance of Sri Krishna, the Pandavas emerged victorious demonstrating the inherent strength of justice, truth, virtue and righteousness. Yudhishtira was conferred the privilege of being crowned by God Himself.

11. God Supreme Arbiter of Destiny

Contentment is the prime requisite of happiness. A person may distinguish himself academically but may not get a job he aspires. One has to feel glad with the position assigned to him, taking it as God's will. While parents may wish their sons to be brilliant administrators, they may turn out to be incorrigible, whereas students in indigent circumstances, may outshine others. All these only remind us of the fact our actions are guided by some unseen power that is Supreme and nothing can be achieved without the sanction of that force—call it by any name. It should be accepted that God alone is the ultimate arbiter of our destiny. Life is often compared to a stage where a show of puppetry is demonstrated and the human beings are the dolls. The Almighty being the manipulator who pulls the strings from behind the scene, whom the audience do not perceive. This Vital message of God's supremacy is brought out in the commencement of the Mahabharata where Bhishma who had enthroned his step-brother, as the ruler, provided a clean and efficient administration indirectly. Bhima is likened to God for his behind-the-stage operations.

See another aspect of life projected through the lives of former rulers. They encouraged the spirit of competition in every field—they could afford because they had the money to stake but were not concerned about the opposite camp who had to accept the challenge. Such competitions may be healthy in respect of education and sports but not in other realms. It is this habit of Yudhishtira, which

to the vengeance that women may try to display once they were let down without proper protection and cited the instance of the princess Amba, who was discarded by her lover, neglected by her parents and disowned by Bheeshma as he had owed to remain celibate. Likening women to a reservoir, the huge sheet of water that was stored, may look placid but no one knows its depth. But once there was a breach, it would cause devastation. Unable to bear the wrong done to her, Amba sought God's protection. By a boon, she manifested herself in Sikhandi who was responsible for Bheeshma's death in Kurukshetra war.

12 All things are possible with Divine Support

The attitude of a person who harbours jealousy deep in his heart but tries to hide it, can easily be exposed. It can be compared to hot coal which is covered with a piece of cloth. His mind will always be ruminating on doing harm to those whom he dislikes. The manner in which Sisupala, closely connected with the heinous plots hatched against the Pandavas, hurled abuses against God-incarnate Sri Krishna and against even the Grandsire Bheeshma, reveal how such jealous men given room for quick anger and invariably for self-destruction, if caught in such a predicament, the best way to get rid of this tendency will be to follow the advice tendered by those who are known to be upholders of righteousness.

Besides acquiring the power to resist temptations and overcoming it, devotion to God will fetch material gains too. Yudhishtira was able to perform one of the toughest religious exercises and earn fame, only due to Divine support. The manner in which God enabled another devotee, Draupadi to save herself by supplying her with an unending length of cloth, when a bad man, with devilish designs, tried to disrobe her, in a public Assembly, again shows His compassion. Her sincere prayers fetched her instantaneous relief whereas those in the grip of envy were destroyed.

sins should not thrive, could have saved himself from ruin, had he listened to the advice of the man who symbolised integrity—Vidura. With his help, he could have avoided the path of destruction. Vidura remarked that Duryodhana's acts were like that of a goat, eating a bundle of grass in which a chisel happened to be concealed and swallowing the latter too, resulting in its death. Surrounded by evil advisors, Duryodhana arranged for the Pandava's exile and later even acted as if he was greatly distressed over their problems in the forest.

13. "Virtuous conduct is Man's Shield"

The only shield for man from problems is his virtuous conduct. Even in challenging situations, if he upholds the dharma, he will, by His grace, emerge victorious. God will help him take correct decisions. That is the reason why sages tell us unequivocally that if dharma is set at naught, man will be ruined.

One of the rules of this moral law urges man to be impartial and treat everyone alike, without giving scope for emotions or other considerations. He may be placed in a bewildering situation, making it extremely difficult for him to distinguish between the right and wrong. For instance, if a person has four brothers, two of them born to his mother and the other two to his stepmother and if he asked to choose only one to share an honour, being a faithful follower of righteousness, his choice will fall on one of his step brothers. The Mahabharata reveals this in the episode of the enchanted pool. A symbol of Dharma, Yudhishtira preferred one of his step-brothers to survive rather than his uterine brothers. The Mahabharata offers many such moral lessons.

Look at the dialogue between an incorporeal voice and Yudhishtira, covering the aspects of human behaviour. By answering the questions correctly, the latter was able to revive his brothers who lay unconscious for having defied an

order. Some of the replies were : The greatest wonder in the world is a person hoping to live for ever, although he witnesses a caravan of the dead everyday. Mind is fleeter than the wind. Happiness is the product of Good conduct. Absence of pride, giving up anger and getting rid of desires will distinguish one from the ordinary: lack of character obliterates erudition.

14. Divine Sanction alone can ensure Success

The basic truth that every human being should realise is that before God's unquestionable powers, his own has absolutely no comparison. The main thrust in scriptural texts is that even a blade of grass can grow only if God so wills. The futility of human endeavour before divine supremacy has been proved and brought out through many episodes. Any plan no doubt requires man's personal attention but even at the last stage when success is expected, if God feels that it should not go through, He can stall its progress. His mandate shall always prevail and if anyone presumes that he can circumvent divine law, he will be sadly mistaken. The Mahabharata incorporates a story, to show how a wedding that was decided by consent in the presence of the Almighty was sought to be annulled and God's decision prevailed ultimately.

Marriage as per Hindu traditions, being an unbreakable bond, extreme care was devoted to match-making. The parents used to make discreet enquiries about the bridegroom's background and about the girl's attitude, as she had to start her life amidst entirely new surroundings. A devotional verse says that a bride will always be eager to have a charming husband, other considerations being secondary. The father of the girl will look to the scholastic attainments of the boy while the mother will be concerned about his earning capacity and the property he holds or is expected to inherit.

Lord Krishna wanted his nephew Abhimanyu to marry

should wed Duryodhana's son. Although God is neither partial towards anyone nor has likes and dislikes. He advised her to reconsider her decision because her choice was the son of their common opponent who had caused damage to the Pandavas, their close relatives. "I feel unhappy if some one disrespects My sincere devotees," God said. Circumstances were created to make the alternative bridegroom himself to refuse to marry Vatsala and her wedding was solemnised with Abhimanyu in the presence of Lord Krishna.

15. Composura in the wake of Adversity.

A man's stature and attitude can be judged by the moral strength he possesses and exhibits it in times of crisis. He may be an intellectual giant and may even be valiant to meet any challenge but if his mind is confused and he vacillates at every stage he can not be depended upon.

Man should maintain equipoise under all circumstances and for this, control of the mind alone, through constant practice and discipline and total check over the senses, should be ensured, in the context of the impending war and when the opponents were gathering support from various sources to be ready for any eventuality, the Pandavas depended on the guidance of the Lord, their saviour. They were not worried by the threat because they were morally right and drew their strength from the Divine.

The Mahabharata through an episode brings out the fact that virtue will always win over vice. The Pandavas' mettle and their courage of conviction were tested. By mistake, once, the Pandavas plucked the only fruit from a tree and were upset on learning that it made its appearance only once in 12 years and was intended for a sage who had fasted for 12 years.

God came to their rescue and said the fruit would

levitate if each one of the five brothers and Draupadi revealed what passed in their mind, without hiding anything. Wedded to truth, which alone sustains the world, each made a startling statement. Yudhishtira said, where there was righteousness, triumph was assured. Contrary to the expectations that he was after the blood of the culprits. Bhima said no one should be punished. Arjuna, who had enjoyed enormous luxury, felt that he should retire to seclusion. Nakula desired to equip himself with knowledge. While Sahadeva wanted the ability to keep his mind under control and develop his character. Draupadi prayed that she should surrender at the feet of Lord Krishna as He had saved her from several dangers. The fruit went back to the tree and the Pandavas were saved from the curse of the sage. Stalwarts remain composed even in the wake of adversity.

16. How to avoid Sin and reach God

The scriptural lore which abounds in this country represents ancient wisdom. Sage Vyasa, contributed the Mahabharat, the Puranas and other works but he had plenty of leisure in his period and the messages contained in them were applicable to that era. What relevance have they now in this computerised age ? many wonder !

Anticipating that posterity would like to have a gist of his scriptural literature, Sage Vyasa, has made in a verse, the Vital declaration : "Do good to others. The doors of Heaven will open for you. Never commit a sin." Is this so easy ? is our next doubt. For this, God Himself in His Divine Song has said "He who does all actions for My sake, looks upon me as the only supreme goal, cultivates pure devotion in all affairs of the word, abjures evil company by all means and is always compassionate to all beings irrespective of caste or creed, attains me." Adi Shankara has said that this statement is the essence of the Gita.

There is a famous prayer of Bhima in the Mahabharat where he says he should see God pervading the whole Uni-

verse, consider all women as the personification of Divinity treating them as his mother, desist from seeking property refrain from abusing or insulting others and that his heart should bleed on witnessing the sufferings of others. There should be sacrifice by every man for the sake of society "Learn to give and not to ask" says the Lord.

To donate without being sought is an admirable trait. But greater is the person who refuses to take something ever when it is thrust on him. Why should anyone leave enormous wealth? Happiness lies in giving. But circumstances may arise when one may be compelled to beg. At that time, the man placed in a better position should offer it willingly instead of criticising or wounding others' sentiments or chasing him away.

There are people who will never change their attitude even when explained about the need to do so. Some may show some reformation for sometime but will revert to their old habits after a period. But rare are those who will be prepared to take same advice and follow it throughout. God comes to one who does his work, dedicating the fruits at His feet. A devotee's plea to God should be to grant him the power to avoid the company of evil forces.

17. Epic Women and power of Chastity

The study of the scriptural lore is intended to discipline one's life, to enable all people to uphold the law of righteous conduct and ultimately to establish moral order. Several codes are prescribed to regulate one's habits. To bring home the need to lead a clean life and cultivate a pure mind, several side stories and episodes, at times, unrelated or remotely related to the main theme are included in the holy books. There are dissertations on philosophy, politics, religion, ethics and law.

One of the Vital lessons taught in the Mahabharat is about the power of chastity. Draupadi was the target of attack of several unscrupulous, wicked and unsocial elements

who took delight in tormenting her. She possessed the ability to punish them but yet she never used the same as she was aware of the noble ideals for which her husband stood and she wanted his greatness to be made known to the world.

The Mahabharat contains a reference to the Ramayana, highlighting Sri Sita's sacrifice, tolerance and chastity. She could have reduced Ravana to ashes but she gave him the longest rope and awaited for her Lord to crush him. Saint Thyagaraja, in a song says that Sri Rama earned his fame only because He enjoyed the privilege of marrying the Princess of Mithila. The epic emphasises the sanctity behind the institution of marriage. It is not essentially intended to make the couple lead a worldly life and pass off without contributing anything to the world. The woman is the custodian of culture. A family should uphold the law of Dharma. Their conduct should be upright and the couple should carry out the spiritual duties assigned for them.

The woman is represented as holding on the top, a ladder made of rope and the man as carefully climbing it, taking note of the consequences, should he fall; It is here the story of Savitri assumes relevance. Though a princess, Savitri decided to marry a prince who by misfortune, was leading a life of a commoner in the forest. Even when warned that he would die within a year, she married him. When his life was being taken away by the Lord of Death, she convinced the latter of the need for his presence. Her power of chastity fetched her the reward. The dialogue between the Lord of Death and Savitri is a treatise on 'Family — its rights and responsibilities.'

18. No act is nobler than being charitable

Hindu scriptures do not prohibit an ambitious man from amassing wealth but plead with him never to turn greedy and utilise his riches for purely personal benefits. Indeed a formula has been prescribed to apportion the money one

has. The income should be divided and earmarked for spending on religious purposes, supporting parents, helping friends, honouring guests and spending on himself. Charity has been assigned the top position in the list of man's pious duties.

There is no act nobler than donation to righteous causes. At the same time there is no greater demeaning profession than seeking alms. Scriptures describe a man's wealth as a trust given to him by God to be spent on genuine purposes and on the needy.

Philanthropy should be spontaneous as well as instantaneous. It should not be extended to gain fame or to show off one's wealth or magnanimity.

In the Mahabharata, Karna's character was one of remarkable generosity. Once to help a poor man, he handed over a golden bowl with his left hand, an act which is barred by the code of ethics. His reply was that mind being so fickle, it might change his decision by the time he transferred the cup from the left hand to the right. In spite of such good conduct, he was associated with unscrupulous men as it was because of destiny. The epic gives the message that man should subject himself to the course of fate. He can neither try to ignore it nor attempt to overcome it, using his ingenuity. Otherwise, one can not explain how Yudhishthira, the symbol of Dharma, could succumb to the temptation to gamble. Karna declined to defect from his mentor's army even after Lord Krishna revealed to him his identity as the brother of the Pandavas. He did not want to be declared an ungrateful wretch by Duryodhana who had elevated him to a high post when all others had despised him. For his charitable disposition and valour, God rewarded him with His Vision, ignoring the fact that he had supported wicked forces.

19. Humility takes devotee nearer to God

God is very much attracted by the humility of the

devotee. The lives of great devotees are characterised by this fine quality. Anyone who seeks His grace, must develop and cultivate humility. But it is a very difficult task indeed. Even greatmen had not met with complete success. One may be very big in the mundane world. But he is a speck before His infinitude. The true devotee, however high-placed he may be, feel that way. He owes every thing to His grace.

Pride is a treacherous trait a person should guard himself against. Pride takes one away from God while humility takes him nearer to God. One may be proud of his status, learning, riches or high caste. Even the Venerable Bhishma and Drona could not conquer it completely. Bhishma was proud of his learning, Drona of his high caste, Duryodhana of his wealth and Ashwathama of his valour.

Lord Krishna, in Hastinapura, gently declined the hospitality of all these persons but Visited Vidura, the embodiment of humility. The poem "Mahabharat" is a divine poem and so it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, excellence of devotion to the Lord, above all it has, for its core, the Bhagawad Gita, the noblest of scriptures.

20. God stays with the Righteous

There has been no instance of God having gone against His promise to guide His devotees or of having let them down. His words are sacred and if the relief expected is not instantaneous, God has a reason. "I shall give refuse to anyone who seeks it," is His authoritative statement. Another declaration of His is that mountains may crumble or the ocean may get dried up but His promises shall be kept up.

His expectations from his devotees are that they should obey His commands and carry out the duties assigned to them without swerving from the path of justice. Where

there is righteousness, God presents Himself there and where the Lord extend, His succour, there is bound to be success. No better evidence is needed than the manner in which the Lord in His incarnation as Sri Krishna, lent his support to the Pandavas. The most important event was the provision of an unending garment to Draupadi when it was being pulled by the cruel Dussasana.

Likewise, the sage known for getting enraged in a trice over nothing was made to retreat as he demanded lunch at an odd hour for himself and his entourage. When the Pandavas in the forest, had completed their day's work, God's affection to them was due to their strict adherence to the rules of righteous conduct.

God's Compassion to devotees was further demonstrated when Sri Krishna opted to go as the emissary of noble brothers to prevent a war. The adage "Pride goes before the fall" is true here. It was proved by Duryodhana, who out of his hatred towards his cousins, refused to spare even a square inch of land. Fully aware of the evil intentions of Duryodhana and that he would never be amenable to reason, the Lord went to his city to plead on behalf of his devotees. "I desire the welfare of the Pandavas. If I succeed in my mission, the Kauravas would have been rescued from the jaws of the battle. The former do not want any favour but they are also prepared for the eventuality—the war." But vanity and arrogance made Duryodhana entirely depend on Physical Strength (with a huge army) than divine force (Lord Krishna's Presence).

21. Faith in God as Supreme Being

One of the admirable traits of the Almighty is His impartiality. He becomes a friend when His devotees display their affection and are ready to obey the commands contained in the scriptural authority. If some choose to display their animosity towards Him, He becomes their foe. This can answer the oft-repeated doubt raised by some as to why

He was inimical towards one group and favoured another, in the Mahabharat.

God's image should always be retained in one's heart and should not be made to leave. "You will be peaceful if you know me. Otherwise you will be miserable." The Pandavas treated Lord Krishna (God in human form) as the Supreme Being while the Kauravas failed to do so. Hence the fault was in the latter when they got a severe drubbing on the battlefield.

There is a "Knot" in the form of "ego" in man and that ought to be removed. He who knows Sri Krishna to be the only enjoyer of the fruits of all sacrifice, master of the Universe, and the only friend of all beings, will be happy. It should be clear in his mind that He is the indweller, supporter and preserver of all creations and that he is the Prime cause of all that exists.

God hates none, is ever compassionate, is indifferent to mundane opposites, firm, harmonious and is above home affinities. Pure faith in Him is the keynote of all scriptures. It is also necessary on the part of a devotee to possess a complete knowledge of God's potentialities. Ignorance may lead to confusion about the nature of the variety of Gods. For instance, if someone says that Duryodhana was killed by Dussasana (his brother) it is a total ignorance and perversion. If it is said that Bhima killed him, that is true knowledge. If a person accepts that he does not know, he is of average intelligence but if he declares that God is behind the entire episode, he will be the wisest.

Knowledge of God head should be secured by submissive spirit, honest enquiry, sense control and steadfast detachment. To prove God's concern for his devotees, an episode in Tukaram's life may be cited. As one who walked and talked with God, he was asked by a couple to obtain information from the Almighty about their offspring for which there was a negative reply. Later, they paid their respects to saint

with a child and it was born. God had honoured his word, "Leave everything to me, I shall take care of you", He declares.

22. The evil effects of Jealousy

The chief cause for a person's self-destruction is the jealousy he generates and harbours within. Mostly, it stems out of the popularity enjoyed by persons whom he dislikes. This will result in trying to acquire that position and when he fails, there will naturally be feverish attempts to cause them harm. Envy breeds desire, which if unfulfilled, turns one into losing the temper. When infuriated, one does not know what he utters. He may, even pour venom.

The Vedas provide as the rules for reformation for mankind. The essence of all the four branches has been presented in the form of a narrative in the Mahabharata. What a man should strive, the epic points out is always to do good to and to wish well of others. If that is not possible, one should not try to spoil others and act as stumbling blocks in their progress. When confronted with problems, it will be wise to take the counsel of men of maturity and integrity whose advice may be unpalatable, but will be fruitful. On the other hand there may be unscrupulous elements who may be ready to surround a fickle-minded person take advantage of his weakness, lure him by false promises and show him short-cut methods but only to lead him to ruin.

The character of Duryodhana has been portrayed in Mahabharat to bring out the above sentiments. He missed the golden opportunity by rejecting the guidance of Vidura, the embodiment of truth and justice. Instead, he depended on the suggestions thrown by his uncle who was having crooked ideas. What kills a man from within is his vicious thoughts. Through this drama, God has chosen to remind us that persons who commit misdeeds, more so by flouting moral laws and divine commands, will never go unpunished. Bene-

volent acts, will certainly be rewarded. Duryodhana's downfall was chiefly due to his getting worked up seeing the fame of his cousins. He deprived them of their riches by dubious methods. Most heinous among his atrocious acts was to derive pleasure in seeing Draupadi suffer before public.

23. God will rush to devotee's rescue

One of the innumerable and rare traits of God is His readiness to extricate His devotees when they are involved in baffling situations. Instances are many where He has gone to their rescue at the appropriate hour. But imagine where two of His devotees, who are in opposite camps and holding opposite views, approaching God for His guidance. In Such a predicament, God with His Supreme powers, knows how to resolve the tangle and save both of them.

In the Mahabharata, such an episode has been incorporated where God had to keep His words extended to two persons. Lord Krishna so cleverly played His role that both were satisfied, though for the sake of honouring the statement made by one among them who had formidable faith in Him, He had to enact a drama. Refer to Bheeshma's words addressed to the Lord "You have the power to kill billions of Bheeshmas but if you pose as a human being, that you are a charioteer, you cannot punish me because I have obtained a boon that I shall die only when I want. But if you accept that you are God, then you can easily send the sacred disk to finish me." Those who listen to the passage (of Bheeshma) will derive mental peace. For the sake of a devotee, He even gave up a pledge. Bheeshma fought with all the strength at his command, yet Duryodhana felt that he was partial to the Pandavas and Karna even insulted him. Bheeshma said that wise men hired by politicians could not speak the truth but have to adjust to the whims and fancies of the employers. As he had eaten the food of Duryodhana, he vowed he would create havoc among the enemy's camp and even make Lord Krishna, their protector, rush to their rescue.

Lord Krishna, had however, taken an oath that in the

promise, made by Duryodhana, when he was rescued from a danger, Arjuna sought the crown from Duryodhana during night, went to Bheeshma and asked from him a special arrow. Mistaking him for Duryodhana, (because of the crown he was wearing) Bheeshma handed it over. The next day, Duryodhana asked Bheeshma to use this powerful weapon, but the latter said it was already given to him previous night. The enraged Bheeshma fought so ferociously that Arjuna could not stand and Lord Krishna has to Summon the Sacred Disc, breaking His own promise. Ultimately, Bheeshma was pierced by an arrow.

24. Forgiveness marks great souls

“To forgive is divine” so goes the adage. There is divinity in every one, though it may lie dormant in some. No doubt, it varies in degree from man to man. It must be possible for anyone to develop the quality of forgiveness. All that is required is earnestness.

Great souls rise to Himalayan heights by their extraordinary acts of forgiveness. Draupadi, overwhelmed by inconsolable grief over the killing of all her children by the vengeful Ashwathama, however pleaded with Arjuna to spare his life. She did not want that Ashwathama's mother too should suffer the agony of her son's loss. Besides, he happened to be the son of Pandava's Guru and hence deserved consideration.

Again, Yudhishtira was so noble as to ignore the attempt of Dhritarashtra to crush Bheema by his embrace, on their triumphant return to Hastinapura, after all their trials and tribulations. He looked after the old man with loving care. The unique epic of Mahabharat was an inexhaustible store house of knowledge and wisdom, throwing light on all subjects from the ordinary rules of conduct one should observe in day-to-day life to the highest and the most sublime philosophical. It was primarily the total self-surrender of

upadi that made the Lord undertake so many tasks for sake of Pandavas and restore to them their kingdom.

Devotion should be a continuous Process

“I have wasted most of my time in eating, dressing, dining to gossip and indulging in glib talk, not realising I could have devoted my attention on God and pursued path of the divine” says an apostle in a verse to express deep anguish in his mind that he had frittered away his energy and resources in Vain pleasures. He has explained to fix one’s mind on God’s form and develop the power of concentration. Disturbances should be of no concern for person who devotes his entire attention on God.

The Mahabharat presents an instance of how Arjuna while learning archery was tested by his preceptor Dronacharya, by asking all the students assembled whether they could identify the target that was to be aimed at. Everyone lied that they could see only the branches or the leaves or fruits of a tree. But Arjuna had all his attention only on Parrot that was to be shot and was oblivious to anyone standing by his side. Such a practice of intense devotion should also be continuous and not spasmodic.

The example of concentration and unhindered devotion is that of a woman who churns buttermilk. The mind should be controlled, ignorance should be overcome and unanimity maintained to achieve the goal. Lord Shiva appeared as a mother till the real one arrived to attend on her daughter’s delivery. God blessed him and made him sing his name and praise.

Think over the manner in which the soul of a man leaves the body, on death. It emerges out through several tortures, according to the good or bad he has done while alive.

Selfless actions help realise Absolute Reality

The Vedas occupy an exalted position among the

and kin may often compel him to give the go-by to the rules of dharma. In a confrontation between attachment towards worldly objects and observance of the code of ethics, the former triumphs. A person might have scrupulously followed the law of righteousness but if self-interest needs giving it up, he will do so. In the Mahabharat, Arjuna's attitude reveals this aspect of the influence of the deep affection for family members. Arjuna was itching for wreaking his vengeance against those who harmed him and his brothers, but when he saw his grand father, his master who taught him archery and all others closely associated with him arrayed against his military formation he was overwhelmed with grief. Emotionally upset, he wondered about the purpose of killing such great men. For a moment, he forgot his Dharma, which was to fight evil and he stood non-plussed. It was at this juncture that Lord Krishna gave the immortal message—man should not fail to discharge his obligations, however inconvenient they may be, but leave the result to God.

No doubt it is easy to sermonise about developing detachment but there will be practical difficulties. A sincere person can entrust himself to God and carry out his duties when God will definitely support him. God takes upon himself to protect his sincere devotees. Despite the fact that his act would have resulted in the annihilation of his own group (Pandavas), Sahadeva, a great devotee of the Lord, Sri Krishna, and expert in astrology, did not hesitate to fix for Duryodhana, the auspicious time to commence the war as he was wedded to truth. Lord Krishna went to His devotee's rescue and caused this very hour to be advanced.

28. Salvation has to be earned by a devotee

God does not create the world once and leave it to itself to work out its destiny as the deists hold God, according to Madhwacharya, is the continuum and cause of all the activities of human beings and the movements in matter. He is the mechanic who runs the machines, that we humans are. Creation is not bringing into being, something which is not

there. It is manifesting what is potential. God apportions bodies to souls according to their past deeds and then brings them to birth, to work out their salvation.

Sri Madhwacharya, the exponent of dualism (Dwaita) accords a unique status to the epic Mahabharat. He considered the Bhagawatham as a great Purana. To both, he has rendered epitomes. On the ethical plane, Sri Madhwa does not envisage at any stage, wherein man can give up his duties. The contention that they bind us and throw us into the endless cycle of births and deaths, is not true of all "Karmas". When performed as a sacrifice and dedicated to the Lord, with no desire for worldly fruits, they not only do not bind us to life, but liberates us. He is opposed to "do-nothingism" and holds that all should perform their duties, however great and wonderful their powers may be.

Sri Madhwacharya has given an excellent manual, describing the way we should worship the Lord, instal idol in temples, perform consecration ceremonies and steps to learn and utter a large number of mantras. He has prescribed the daily routine of religious-minded men. God is the infinite home of all auspicious attributes. He has supreme powers and reveals Himself to devotees in different measures, according to their spiritual eligibility.

He lays down that each soul should work out its moral life and thus prepare to receive the Lord's grace. The love of the Lord grows in us with ceremonial purity and ethical excellence, both of which, are necessary for devotion. The God of Sri Madhwa's philosophy does not bestow the prizes of life, viz., Wealth, progeny, honour etc. on the souls in a whimsical or arbitrary manner.

29. Fate's decree is unalterable

Mighty empires have tumbled and illustrious rulers and men of distinction have faded out. What remains however is a person's zeal to uphold virtue. One may go through

agony but will ultimately reap the fruits of one's sacrifices. Several episodes in scriptural literature remind us constantly about the powerful influence of destiny. No one can get away from its clutches but the pious will not be concerned about the ups and downs.

The main theme in the Mahabharat refers to the triumph of righteousness over evil. God guided the Pandavas when they were in danger. Advice came from saints and sages. They were not allowed to be demoralised by misfortunes. Having spent twelve years in the forest, following their defeat in the game of dice, they had to remain incognito for a year.

The emperor who had held his sway over a vast territory had to take up the assignment of a royal courtier under the Virat king. Bheema, the indefatigable, worked as a cook while Arjuna became a dance master. Though he suffered a curse, yet it was a blessing in disguise. The other two did the jobs of looking after the horses and the cows. But the worst calamity befell Draupadi, a princess by birth as she had to attend on the queen. Fate's decree is unalterable.

30. Duties include spiritual austerities

All Hindu religious sects are agreed on the fact that it is imperative for a human being to zealously carry out the duties ordained in the holy texts. "Duties" do not mean only those activities which a person discharges as part of his routine, to eke out a living. They also represent those austerities, spiritual exercises, penance and other vows prescribed by divine literature. When these holy commands are upheld, the mind will get rinsed of all its impurities and the person may be able to realise God easily.

Religious functions, performed with avidity and faith, should be dedicated to God. He will give the due rewards. Placing total reliance on God should not be misconstrued as "do-nothing-ism". The nature of the duties assigned to a man also differ. Some are essential and cannot be dispensed

with like eating and sleeping. Some may be performed at the pleasure of the individual. The third category is God-centred and these should never be given up. Only on these basis, Lord Krishna advised Arjuna not to shirk his responsibility but go ahead with fighting, leaving the results to God. The role of devotion in man's existence is great. Devotees are of various types but the most ardent ones would never seek from God any material gain. Some appeal to God to grant them worldly needs, some seek spiritual favours while some others pray for the restoration of their status and wealth which they may have lost. Observance of duty coupled with cultivation of devotion, will make a person yearn to acquire spiritual knowledge. Among God's creations, man alone has the power to think, sift and act judiciously.

It is humorously said that once, cows called a conference to assert that they too have a language of their own. They have two horns which man does not possess, are blessed with four legs and their physical size is bigger and hence they are superior to men. But the fact is that they cannot utter the name of God nor resort to devotional exercises nor function with diligence.

31. Why a dip in holy rivers is essential

A tradition still deeply cherished by many Hindus as part of their religious duties during their journey through this life is the visit to some of the holy centres where rivers considered sacred, flow and take a dip in the waters. Apart from purification of the body, the mind is also purged of vicious thoughts. More than these factors, this act of bathing in rivers was intended to bring about national integration. For centuries, devotees from deep south used to travel all the way to Varanasi and those from the North took it as a "must" to have sea-bath worship the deity in Rameswaram. There was a fusion of culture and exchange of customs. Devotees derived peace through this ritual. Arjuna experienced personally the benefits accrued by a dip in many holy

rivers and visiting holy temples where he could get darshan of many eminent sages and saints.

Whether God can be seen ? All cannot enjoy His vision but this presence can be felt through His acts of mercy and compassion. Scriptures describe His innumerable traits, the outstanding being, His concern for those who have sought His refuge. God's traits and water, which is necessary for man's survival and which at times even serves as his food, possess several similarities and this is also the reason why seers had prescribed bathing in sacred rivers and tanks as a ritual. God takes incarnations and comes down to earth to protect his devotees and water too, always flows from an upper region to the plains.

Even as the quantity that a man draws from a well, tank or a river depends on the vessel (a mug, a pitcher or a huge drum), the grace that a devotee receives from God depends on the intensity of his dedication and the confidence he displays. Water is cool always but gets warm only when it is heated. It regains its original nature when water is added. Likewise, God is ever merciful but at times. He appears to be unsympathetic but by our prayers. His anger can be removed. God resides in the ocean of milk, in the hearts of devotees, takes incarnations but the most popular form is an idol. Even a minute prior to consecration, the image is considered as a mere stone but the moment it gets sanctity by holy water being poured on it, it is due for worship. As a measure of atonement for having entered the chambers of his brother when he was in the company of Draupadi. Arjuna toured all over the county and bathed in various rivers.

32. Religious recipes for keeping the mind pure

Hinduism has provided an aspirant, who is eager to get rid of worldly bondage, with an exhaustive list of spiritual exercises. They include nine methods of cultivating devotion and eight types of personal worship. They will enable a sincere person to move with saintly characters, keep the

mind pure, retain the vision of God within and treat every being as God's creation. The highest priority among the nine modes of 'Bhakthi' has been assigned to listening to the expositions of scriptural literature which reveal the incomparable and remarkable traits of God, particularly His compassion to the weak.

The best example of a beneficiary of divine grace was that of a king who, mistaking the silence of a saint (who was in a state of trance following deep meditation) as an insult, through the skin of a dead snake around the neck. For his act of indiscretion, he suffered a curse but he got released from the shackles which tied him to worldly activities through "sravanam". He was the grandson of the Pandavas who fought a righteous war, with the help of Lord Krishna and demonstrated that those who uphold the Law of Virtue will never fail.

The Mahabharata has a wide-ranging interest—literary, sociological, political, spiritual and ethical. Lord Krishna acted as the mentor of the Pandavas, who symbolised "Righteousness". The trials they faced could have made anyone else, placed under similar circumstances, totally collapse but they pinned their faith in God's dispensation and emerged victorious. To study how they were saved will give us mortals, moral strength.

Four out of the eight religious recipes for steadying the mind are mentioned in this epic. The eight relate to tasting and taking a dip in the holy Ganga, chanting the Gayatri Mantram, reciting at least a chapter from the Gita, worship of an image, offering it thulasi petals, sandalwood paste and other tributes, observing fast twice in a month (Ekadasi) dedicating what we eat at the feet of the Lord and repeating the 1008 names of God (Sahasranama). The tale of Ganga and her son Bheeshma, the significance of Gayatri through the Savitri episode, the song—celestial (Gita) and the Praise of Vishnu through the garland of hymns: containing

His glorious attributes, form part of the Mahabharata. It is a narration of God's support to noble causes.

33. The quintessence of true devotion

Can a parent detest and discard his young son just because he had committed a wrong? The father is deeply concerned about the welfare of all his children and bestows his affectionate care on all of them. God the Universal father is similarly concerned about the welfare of all his children. The punishment He may mete out to some is only intended to reform them.

It is also true that some are able to endear themselves to Him by engaging themselves in acts that please Him. These pious souls lead a Dharmic life and practise true devotion, pinning absolute faith in Him. Sri Krishna Himself had acknowledged these people as dearest to Him.

For a large majority of people, devotion to God consists informal worship of the Deity and making offerings. Visiting temples, making pilgrimage, etc. also form part of devotion. These religious practices are no doubt good and useful, but true devotion does not stop here.

True devotion means reposing unwavering faith in God in all situations and under all circumstances in an attitude of absolute self-surrender. All religious duties and obligations one is called upon to perform according to shastraic injunctions are only intended to lead to this glorious end, namely, practice of true devotion.

Sri Krishna, the Supreme was specially attracted to the Pandavas who adhered to Dharma and absolute faith in Him. How many tasks He had undertaken for them? He acted even as a charioteer to Arjuna; he went to Hastinapura as a messenger of peace to get for them, their rightful share of the kingdom. He helped them out of many a critical situation.

34. Adherence to Dharma keeps a man happy

Ahimsa—non—injury to others by thought, word and deed—is the highest Dharma one should try to practise, say the scriptures. The object of the Shastras is to guide man along the right path so that he can attain peace and happiness in the life here and hereafter. A contented man alone can be a happy person and a happy person alone, in turn, can have a mind free from violent passions like jealousy and hatred. An envious person harms himself more than he harms others and with his warped mind commits many improper acts and finally lands himself in disaster. That was Duryodhana in Mahabharata. He was burning with jealousy at the prowess, prosperity and popularity of his Pandava cousins and planned a strategem to do away with them. His greed and hatred knew no bounds. When a person is possessed by such base, violent, passions, he bids goodbye to reasoning and discrimination. He hardly needs the advice and warnings of elders and wise persons, who are his well-wishers. On the contrary, he would listen only to evil persons as Duryodhana took counsel only from Shakuni.

Dhritarashtra represents the doting parent, who out of his extreme fondness for his children, sometimes, even knowingly followed the wrong path. The old King, no doubt, also loved his brother's sons, the Pandavas, but his deep attachment for his own sons, often made him yield. He did object initially, when Duryodhana wanted an invitation to be sent to Yudhishtira for a game of dice. But weak-willed as he was, he finally yielded to the desire of his obstinate son because of his attachment to him. Accordingly Dhritarashtra sent the invitation through Vidura. The Pandavas came out unscathed from every trial and tribulation thanks to Sri Krishna's help.

5. Crime to waste the Golden opportunity

Can it be truly said that all people live their lives as human beings? Is it not a fact that a large majority go

out their earthly existence in a manner not much different from the way animals do ? Man also spends his time eating, drinking, procreating and dying just like any animal.

Scriptures call upon man not to fritter away his time and energies in Vain pursuits, pointing to him the terrible loss he is inflicting on himself. The human birth is a golden opportunity, not to be wasted. All those born on earth have necessarily to pass through periods of both adversity and prosperity, joys and sorrows. The wise person bears all his sufferings never deviating from the path of righteousness and always pinning faith on God. The Mahabharata only underlined this fact and presented the example of illustrious Pandava brothers.

Ordinary human beings get terribly upset, feel depressed and even curse the Gods at the slightest stroke of misfortune. Should they not take a leaf from the lives of the Pandava Princes who underwent indescribable suffering ? They were all of divine birth, possessed incredible powers and on top of all, Sri Krishna was on their side. Ultimately Pandavas won with the Lord's grace. But there is no shortcut to success.

Evil forces will be ultimately Crushed

Two mighty forces—spiritual and material—are perpetually at war with one another, in the heart of a human being. Where a person upholds the principles of righteousness and sticks to truth, he can get over the influence of materialistic pleasures. The constant struggle and the ultimate success of good over evil are portrayed in the Mahabharata through the Kurukshetra battle. Lord Krishna acts as a guide revealing the benevolent nature of the Supreme Being to help those who seek His guidance. He never took part in the battle but advised the puzzled disciple, in the last minute, desired to retire from the battle field. "It will be cowardice to run away at this critical

instruct. Give up your faint-heartedness and fight" says the Lord.

In the opening verse of the Lord's song—celestial, the blind King knows that both the parties have assembled only to assert the superiority of one over the other but yet harbours a fond hope—out of deep attachment, that his brother's sons (the Pandavas), the torch-bearers of virtue, would refrain from fighting and that his sons would be left unhurt. This shows that a person, blinded by utter selfishness, will try to ride on the shoulders of pious men. But Kurukshetra is the place to weigh "Dharma".

The events of Kurukshetra indicate that an aspirant could fight to cut asunder the knot—the very "illusion" in his inner self. Some people hold the mistaken view that the Lord's message is conducive to war and as such is a political treatise. Without the help of a spiritual guide, the obstacles facing a man while he takes up the cudgels against evil forces, cannot be overpowered. The destructive forces, though always aggressive, will be finally crushed just as darkness vanishes at dawn. At times, a spiritual aspirant may come across glaring instances of eminent men being compelled to obey the dictates of Vice. Such situations can be faced by the person entrusting himself to the Almighty through the religious leader.

. Influence of attachment

While mentioning various human foibles, sacred texts never fail to refer to the influence of attachment to one's wife and kin. It will take precedence over duty and righteous action. A person may remain disciplined, follow the precepts of Dharma and discharge his duties without fear but these will fall flat before affection. Should one be compelled to help a person whom he loves deeply but who is indisciplined and should this involve his giving a go by to his principles, he will not mind stepping aside even from the path of Dharma.

The Mahabharata projects this theme through various instances. Attachment versus Duty is also the central question discussed in the dialogue between the Lord and His devotee. The itch to wield the arms and punish the culprits vanished where Arjuna thought of his relationship with Bhishma and Drona. "Of what purpose is the battle in which millions will perish and of what use governing a country after annihilating many", was the doubt that suddenly dropped in his mind. His remorse was chiefly due to "attachment". When Karna sought a boon that should he die, Kunti should acknowledge openly that he was her son and when she agreed, it again indicated the powerful grip of deep affection.

That there should be no compromise on principles is another theme discussed in this epic. In the case of the fine arts, there may be occasions when the artist may be confronted with certain baffling predicaments. In such cases, invariably, he may try to utter untruth and escape from the situation. For instance, if a master in astrology, finds himself in quandary, precluding him from spelling out the real position, he may give vague replies. But an artist who is true to his profession, will not hesitate to speak the truth.

Sahadeva was an expert in astrology and under strange circumstances, he was asked by his arch-enemy, Duryodhana, to prescribe the auspicious time to commence the war. Fully aware that such a step would spell his own ruin but at the same time, knowing that he should be true to the art, he had hesitated, he still stipulated the time. However during such occasions, God will protect these pious, sincere and honest men. The Lord changed the date by a clever manipulation and the Pandavas were saved from extinction.

3. Yield not to temptations

Nature provides ample scope for human beings to draw inspiration from all divine creations and mould their own character. The occurrence of eclipse too has a message in

that the moon, which derives its lustre and luminosity from the Sun covers the latter on occasions, making it dim. Likewise, the impermanent pleasures which emanate from man, enslave him later and even ruin him. The scriptures frequently warn a person not to yield to temptations resulting in degeneration.

By gaining superiority through deceitful methods, Duryodhana became more haughty, taunted the chaste Draupadi and behaved indecently. But he reaped the fruits for his misdemeanour by being left all alone in the battle field to suffer utter humiliation. It was of his own making and he had to be punished for his misbehaviour.

The law of Dharma may often land itself to different interpretations. In such circumstances, one has to rely on divine utterances. As Duryodhana was dying, his ally Ashwathama, as an act of revenge, killed the innocent children of the Pandavas. He was captured and Arjuna, supported by Lord Krishna and Bheema, felt that for the gravity of the offence, he deserved extreme punishment. But Yudhishthira and even Draupadi, who was the most affected, argued that he should not be paid back in the same coin as he was the son of their Acharya, from whom they had learnt archery and mantras. Shastras prohibit slighting the Guru or his family.

Lord Krishna ultimately solved the tangle. Agreeing with both the views, He said that Ashwathama could be let off after being disfigured which would amount to his being severely reprimanded and totally condemned. The Lord's Words prevailed. Where the Mahabharata concludes, the Bhagawatham commences.

39. Need to train Children properly

While parents may desire to have obedient, well-behaved and disciplined children, it is also their duty to take them into confidence and train them properly in maintaining

family traditions. Instead of imposing their views upon the youngsters, they should convince them by gentle persuasion.

When subjects, particularly, in relation to their marriage, are discussed dispassionately, children are bound to agree with the suggestions made by the elders. The life of Sri Rama is intended to highlight the great message that a son should implicitly carry out his father's wishes.

Likewise, in the very beginning of the Mahabharata, the same idea is conveyed by King Pradeepa asking his son, Santanu, to wed a girl of his choice on condition that her actions should not be questioned. She was Gangadevi in human form who had agreed to this alliance to redeem eight celestials of their curse. While Santanu was a mute witness to Gangadevi's fiendish conduct of throwing away seven of their children in the river, he could not bear the sight when the turn came for the eighth son. She spelt out the divine secret, took away the child, trained him for some years and then left him with Santanu. The prince was later acclaimed as Bheeshma for his grim vow to remain unmarried in his life, to enable his father to take a second wife.

40. Chief aim of Yagams

The chief objective of Yagam is to propitiate the Gods so that with their blessings, peace and plenty may reign on earth. On this occasion, presents in cash and kind are made not only to the Vedic Scholars who perform the austerities but also to the other learned who throng to witness them. This tradition of the Hindus from time immemorial is being adhered to even today in many parts of the country.

At the suggestion of Narada, who explained the significance and aims of Yagams in general, Yudhishtira, after he was crowned King, with Indraprastha as his Capital, had arrangements made for performance of the Rajasuya sacrifice. To ensure its success, Bheema had, with the hint

given by Sri Krishna, to kill Jarasandha, in a terrible combat without weapons. Another obstacle came in the form of Sisupala who, objecting to the first honours, enjoined by custom, being rendered to the Lord of Dwaraka, spoke disparagingly of Him and staged a walk-out in protest, followed by several like-minded rulers. This boastful king was slain by the Lord after a duel.

Earlier, Maya, the architect of the celestials, in token of his gratitude to Arjuna, who had saved him from the Khandava forest fire, had a special palace, built for the Pandavas in the renovated city which was renamed Indraprastha.

41. The simplest formula for comfort

Confronted with bewildering problems and ever steeped in turmoil, the modern man is in constant quest of mental peace. At the same time, living in the speed-age, he has no time to resort to the study of religious literature or to do the exercises prescribed in the scriptures. But God has not let him to drift or to remain ever dejected. God has prescribed to suit the present-day conditions, a recipe that is the simplest and the easiest by adopting which man can derive comfort. The formula is to recite the names of God at any time convenient to him. There is no bar to the recital of God's names and anyone can do it.

The chief character in the Mahabharata, Yudhistira was somewhat unhappy at the events which led to the war. Even though he won, his mind was full of grief. To clear the confusion, he was led to Bhishma, who in the very presence of the Lord Krishna, recited His 1000 different names compiled and handed over to humanity as "Vishnu Sahasranama". Each name, had been evolved by sages after great scrutiny and prescribed by Vyasa. They are "Mantras" possessing spiritual power. A person may not know their meaning but if uttered with strong faith, he is sure to experience the change within. Sri Adi Shankaracharya has given

us the most brilliant commentary on it which ranks as the highest treatise. Each name has atleast ten connotations, according to Sri Madhwacharya. Even amidst the mechanical life, a person can repeat God's names, the only requisite being his faith in their efficacy.

42. Devotion takes human beings near God

When God (who is certain to respond to all our appeals) decides to extend His protection, no one can prevent Him nor will there be any need to seek the help of other agencies. On the other hand, for reasons best known to Him, if He withholds His succour, no one can compel Him to alter the same. All that God expects of us is the sincerity, purity, intensity and the depth of our devotional fervour. It is hence, absolutely necessary for a devotee to keep his heart freed from all wicked influences to enable the Lord to reside there. How a person worships the Lord is purely personal. Even as one may relish only a particular dish but derive full satisfaction there from, a devotee may choose any manifestation of God's and remain dedicated and chant His names. As an example of devotion, instance is mentioned of a person, who used to offer his daily worship but who once found one of the items of offerings (fruit) missing (caused by God to test him) and he did not go ahead with his rites till that shortage was made up. Not that he was ignorant of the fact that God will not partake of it directly but he was firm in his conviction. Above all, while seeking God's pardon for our lapses we should not ask for favours. What we deserve, is best known to Him and hence the decision is entirely in His hands. God has great concern for his devotees and His regret in not compensating adequately for their prayers. Sri Krishna felt that He had not been more generous to Draupadi and Kuchela as against the confidence shown in Him. The guidance Sri Krishna had extended to her sons (Pandavas) and the perils from which He had saved them were narrated by Kunti. The classic illustration of His compassion she said was the help given to Draupadi when the Pandvas displayed their restraint and elders stood helpless when unscrupulous

pulous men attempted to strip her in an assembly. Sri Krishna made the culprits regret for their arrogance. The Various episodes in scriptures, particularly the Bhagawatham, prove that devotion took human beings near God.

43. How power and wealth should be used

Power and wealth are gifted to man by God not to enable him to build an empire around himself or promote the interests of a coterie and his kith and kin. He is expected to remain impartial, help all those in need and render justice to all. Personal considerations should not guide him. The episodes in the scriptural literature are intended to impress on man the need to develop detachment and cultivate desirelessness.

Man may try to amass wealth but the scriptures remind us that none of it will accompany him on his death. A balance sheet of his good and pious deeds and of the sins he had committed, knowingly or unknowingly, will be drawn up and he will reap their consequences. That is the reason why a person is advised not to yield to temporary pleasures or display hypocrisy. Further, a person's wife and children expect him to extend them all comforts. If he fails to do so they despise him.

Great concern was voiced by Lord Krishna for His devotees, the Pandavas, who were not treated properly by their Uncle King Dhritarashtra, who was too lenient toward his son, Duryodhana and others, although they possessed all evil traits. Not only was he blind but his mind too was clouded. Deputed by Lord Krishna, Akrura pleaded with the King to be fair to both the groups and avoid desires. Akrura explained to him that happiness derived from the pursuit of worldly pleasures was comparable to the clear layer of water in a well on the surface below which lay sludge and dirt. These pleasures are like some edibles which are tasty for the tongue but unhealthy for the human system.

In spite of his advice, Dhritarashtra could not overcome his affection for his sons.

44. Happiness is an attitude of Mind

Happiness is ultimately a matter of one's attitude. What is a source of joy to one, may not be so to another. For instance, a person may, by temperament, may prefer simple living and therefore averse to wealth. The mere fact that an individual has enormous riches does not mean that he is very happy. Similarly the one who is endowed with less money, by common standards, need not, in all cases, feel miserable. So two persons, placed in similar circumstances, may react differently. Because experience is subjective, an individual struck repeatedly by misfortune is apt to believe that he had been singled out by destiny for harsh treatment. To know that there have been persons worse off than him will be comforting to his mind. Not that it is going to lessen, in anyway, the trials and tribulations he may have to suffer. But it serves to boost his morale to endure the adversities and infuse hope that the dark days are sure to end sooner or later.

While on exile, Yudhistira was overcome by dejection because of prolonged separation from Arjuna who had gone for penance to secure the Pasupatastra and due to intermittent outbursts of emotion by Bheema against observing restraint. Yudhishtira wondered whether anyone else had been more unfortunate than him. Then it was that one of the sages related the story of Emperor Nala, who not only lost his kingdom in a game of dice, like Yudhishtira but was put to more severe and agonising tests. What was more, he had to face the challenges and undergo the suffering alone without anyone to share them. Yudhishtira, at least, had been fortunate in having four brothers and Draupadi to stand by him through thick and thin.

45. Nine steps to Eternal Bliss

The religious obligations of a devotee are two-fold—

those performed to gain immediate temporary material benefits and others, carried out not expecting reward (Pravritti and Nivritti margas). The Consequences of one's actions, good as well as bad, make him come back to the world; hence both are fetters, with the simple difference, that the former (Punyam) are made of gold, while the Papam (sins) requiring him to spend some time in hell, are of iron. The aim of a sincere devotee should be to get release from bondage and be rid of rebirth. This is possible only by striving hard to reach "Moksham", the steps for which are arduous but can be practised if one shows determination. Sage Markandeya spelt out the methods to attain "Moksha" to Yuchi-shtira. The distance between God and the devotee is very little. To reach Him, the latter has to climb nine steps.

The first tier represents "Viveka"—acquisition of Spiritual knowledge—to distinguish between the real and the unreal, the truth and the falsehood and which gives the power of self-introspection. This is followed by an expression of regret at the enormity of the devotee's sins, displaying of guilt. The next step is to cultivate detachment. There is bheethi or fear, whether he is entitled to get God's grace and whether he can go near Him and the fifth, the individual's obligations. Once he ascends them, God Himself makes arrangements to lead him through the other four and in God's presence, he starts enjoying permanent bliss, he never re-appears in the world.

46. Gratitude is a Cardinal Virtue

Gratefulness is one of the cardinal human virtues. Every one is enjoined to remember forever the help he has received from another and to do him good in return. The value of any assistance is determined not by material standards but by the timing of it and the noble thought behind the gesture. What may appear insignificant in normal circumstances becomes invaluable in times of crisis. For instance, no value can be set for the help rendered to save one's life or honour, nor can it be adequately recompensed. W

ever realises this and dedicates himself to the service of his benefactor is worthy of commendation and highest esteem.

When Karna stood humiliated by Kripacharya who dismissed him as unfit to challenge Arjuna because of his dubious parentage and lack of royal status, Duryodhana rushed to his rescue and announced that Karna would be the King of Angadesa from that moment. It was then that Karna decided and resolved to submit himself heart and soul to Duryodhana who saved his honour at a time when it was assailed by one and all. May be Duryodhana's motive was not altruistic, but that was not Karna's concern. For, as one who benefited by Duryodhana's timely help, it was his bounden duty to sacrifice everything for him.

Karna had a host of good qualities in him, apart from his being a peerless warrior and his philanthropic disposition was unique. The only fault of Karna was that he was in the camp of Duryodhana. But for that reason, to rate him along with Sakuni, Dussasana and Duryodhana and call them "the Wicked Four" was unfair to him and to the virtues he upheld.

47. None can escape penalty for sins

Varied are the ways in which sins recoil. The malefic effects of the misdeeds of an individual has committed take shape in different forms, making him pay the penalty by way of mental agony or physical suffering. Some have to put up with chronic diseases, while some others are made to face successive failures in life. Egotism and devilish tendencies that some display and which inevitably lead them to disaster are attributable to one's sinful act. No adversity is more difficult to endure than what results from having a termagant as wife. A person may be endowed with all that goes to make life happy---wealth, status, sound health, etc. But all this will be set at naught if he is not fortunate enough to have a good and loving wife. In the same way if the sons born to an individual turn out to be wayward and wicked, he

is sure to be in for serious trouble and he will have only his Fate to blame for it. One can imagine the plight of Dhritarashtra, who had a hundred sons, all of whom as a class, with the exception of Vikarna, were vicious and vile.

There were occasions when one was asked to be blind, deaf and dumb. A person must not see the other man's defects and shortcomings. He should turn a deaf ear to gossip and slander about others and be a mute as not to speak ill of others. But Dhritarashtra had it all wrong. Blind that he was, he closed the eye of his mind to the evil designs of Duryodhana and became deaf so as not to heed the wise counsel of Vidura, who tried his utmost to din into his ears that what his sons were doing were against all norms of justice and fairplay.

48. No barrier of formality between two friends

Certain secrets by their very nature, cannot be shared with one's parents, sons or even wife. The only one in whom an individual can confide, without any reservation, is his friend. But there are umpteen varieties of them—acquaintances, fairweather ones, opportunists, etc. Obviously, not all of them can qualify to be let into one's secrets. The two must have moved intimately over a number of years and their friendship stood the test of time before they can be called true companions. When this stage is reached, the way they moved with each other, may appear to exceed the limits of decency. There will be no barrier of formality to separate them and each will be running errands for the other without any consideration of prestige. Among the different modes of worshipping the Supreme Being is look upon Him as one's fast friend and this path is more difficult to tread than it seems because it requires an exceptionally hard core of Bhakti and total dedication. A devotee of this class will turn to the Almighty for anything and everything and the Lord. Like a true friend, stand by him through thick and thin.

Arjuna was an example of this type of Bhakti and no wonder Sri Krishna Himself designed a plot for him to realise his ambition of marrying Subhadra, the Lord's sister.

49. Self-Surrender : Vital for God-realisation

The most benign and sublime act of God is not only to reveal to us what divine bliss can be but also provide us the steps to enjoy it. It will be meaningless if a person is bestowed with riches without the capability to use them. A beggar will not feel happy if he is handed over a herd of elephants as he cannot maintain them nor protect them. Unlike the wealthy person who may feel content with donating the elephants. God knows what to grant to his devotees and also to Point out the way to realise Him.

The essential requisite on the part of the human being yearning to obtain this bliss is to express his utter helplessness, entrust himself to the Almighty and plead his inability to act independently and make it plain that he can survive only with His support. When such an attitude is displayed called "Atma Samarpanam" or surrender of the self. God assumes the responsibility to extend his unqualified protection, making us face all hazards boldly. A devotee's confidence and God's succour were demonstrated in Mahabharata, when Draupadi was due to be disrobed by unscrupulous villains. Her stirring appeal reached Sri Krishna, who saved her honour.

Youth, power, wealth, and ignorance, each by itself, is suffice to turn a man extremely arrogant. The Youth in general, will not care to listen to advice. Power always corrupts. The wealthy will look down upon others, while a person who lacks understanding will not tolerate criticism. Anyone, in whom, all these are combined, will not be enabled to reason. Duryodhana possessed them and out of Malice, he was determined to crush the Pandavas.

50. Patience does not mean docility

Patience does not mean absolute docility and subservience. Restraint is a Virtue but there is a limit to bearing affronts. A person with capacity to retaliate cannot refrain himself from hitting back and remain without taking any action by relying on destiny and pinning his hopes on God. This might indicate that he is a coward. A sage advised a cobra not to do any harm to people. So it was quiet but people thought that it was a weak cobra and began to beat it. The sage told the cobra that his advice related only in respect of the cobra not harming any one voluntarily, but not to be passive when attacked. On the other hand, it should create terror by its hissing and thereby keep the opponents away. Unable to suffer the plight of forest life any further, Draupadi once sought to know from Yudhishtira as to why he should be so meek when he possessed the inherent strength to strike back. He gave a brilliant exposition in reply, of "Kshama" declaring that patience was bound to be rewarded. This trait along with the anxiety to adhere to righteousness and to speak truth, would result in triumph. Bound by a vow, he had to spend the exile period at the end of which, he said, he would get back his legitimate share of the kingdom by right or by use of force, if necessary.

The story of a dying mother, who extracted a promise from her bandit son, never to utter a lie; Later on, while on his trip to loot the state treasury, he met another burglar (the King in disguise) with whom he struck a deal to divide the booty equally. Deliberately leaving one out of the three precious gems, both of them shared the remaining two and parted. Next day, the King asked his Minister to probe into the theft. Not aware of the King's involvement, the minister appropriated the third diamond for himself, presuming that his action would go unnoticed and reported the loss of all the three. The King exposed his fraud and replaced him by the honest thief.

51. Family attachments blur one's vision

Marriage and family bonds that arise from it, bring about a sea-change in the attitude and behaviour of a person. Till he is trapped in the net of attachment, he may show the utmost concern for the norms of justice and fairplay and be highly virtuous. But once, he has a family of his own, his vision will be coloured and judgement biased. His thoughts and deeds will be influenced by the interests of his children. To him, whatever they do, will appear right and others invariably in the wrong. It is this attachment towards her sons that caused the downfall of Gandhari from the pinnacle of glory.

On hearing that her spouse-to-be, Dhritarashtra was blind, Gandhari blind folded herself and remained as such for life. This act of hers elevates her to the rank of the finest specimen of womanhood. In striking contrast to this was her behaviour towards Draupadi, whom Dussasana wanted to appear in the Royal court after she had been "lost" by Yudhishtira in a game of dice. In a desperate attempt to save her selfrespect and womanhood, Draupadi sought refuse in Gandhari, hoping that the latter would chastise her son. But Gandhari urged her to go with Dussasana and what is more, she made some derisive remarks about Draupadi's anxiety to protect her chastity.

The image of Gandhari as a woman of nobility is shattered beyond repair by this most despicable and cruel act of hers. The reason for her change is her blind affection for her sons.

52. Nemesis certain to strike the arrogant

Arrogance stems from the delusion that nothing is beyond man's powers. When a person finds success, crowning his effort on a few occasions that he can have everything his way on the basis of his own strength and the support he gets from his friends. This is particularly true of the unscrupulous

who outstep their limits and go all out to harass the virtuous mistaking their patience for weakness. "If they have the courage, let them face me in a duel"—those who have spoken in such a challenging tone are known to have regretted that attitude later when Nemesis struck them.

Duryodhana believed that with the valorous Karna, vicious Sakuni and veteran warriors like Bhishma and Dronacharya on his side he could never be vanquished. To Sri Krishna, who pleaded on behalf of the Pandavas for, at least, five houses, he said, at the height of self conceit, that he would not give even a negligible bit of land to them, who dared not fight when Draupadi was put to shame. "Let them face us in battle and win back the kingdom" he cackled with a derisive smile, Sri Krishna warned Duryodhana that he would feel sorry for his obduracy, when on the battle field he stood alone, crest-fallen and desolate, everyone else having been slain in the war. The Lord also indicated that the havoc would be caused mostly by Arjuna, with Himself wielding the reins of the chariot. Duryodhana, aided & abetted by his associates, went to the extent of trying to take Sri Krishna captive—the limit of his foolishness. The Lord replied to Duryodhana by revealing His transcendental form.

53. Devotion to God, a basic instinct

Devotion to God is inborn in man. It is a basic instinct and no legislation or coercion or threat could prevent people from worshipping the Almighty. Some may denigrate God but inwardly, in their hearts, there is bound to lurk a deep-seated fear of the superior powers of the supreme Being. Even Hiranyakasipu acknowledged the existence of God, but he erred in claiming that he was more powerful.

Some people display spiritual inclination even from their childhood. Their day-to-day activities will be directed to God. There are others who remain unconcerned about worship of God and their religion for half of their life time but suddenly, due to some strange factors (by association



with saints or reading scriptural texts or listening to Lectures), their attitude changes and they take to spiritual pursuits post-haste.

Duryodhana's stern warning to those assembled in the palace not to get up from their seats or show reverence to Lord Krishna when He came to represent Pandava's case proved absolutely a waste as at his very appearance struck by His dazzle and charm, everyone voluntarily rose and offered their respects.

Enraged at Duryodhana's abusive epithets, Vidura broke his bow and threw the pieces away vowing not to take part in the war. Vidura explained to Sri Krishna that he had tolerated Duryodhana's insults earlier. Duryodhana's insolent behaviour in the very presence of Sri Krishna, was sheer sacrilege, Vidura said. Apart from the holy spots, where consecrated idols were worshipped the term "Temple" would include any place where any act associated with God was practised. People in these congregations should be discreet.

54. Hypocrisy shrouded by 'Dharma'

There are any number of hypocrites in Society. Not infrequently does one find persons expressing utmost concern for Dharma and professing to adhere to its principles sincerely. From the way they speak and behave, one will be led to believe that there can be no better exemplar of virtue than them. But if only an individual is shrewd and persistent enough to probe deeper and look beyond the facade of nobility, he will discover, in many cases, the existence of an entirely different personality, which is just the opposite of what is seen outside. The very people who claim that hands are clean—unsullied by corruption and other malpractices—will on closer scrutiny of their actions, be found to have abused their powers for the benefit of their relatives and friends. An illustration of this class of two faced persons is Salya, an uncle of the Pandavas.

An expert charioteer, next only to Sri Krishna in art, Salya was on his way, with his army, to join the Pandavas. While doing so, he walked into a trap laid by Duryodhana to bring him into their side. He partook of a dinner without knowing that it was hosted by Duryodhana and when he came to know of it, agreed to be in the Kaurava camp for the Kurukshetra war, since ethics demanded that one should never oppose a person from whom he had taken food. In secret, Salya told Yudhishtira that by being in the enemy camp, he would strive for Pandava's Victory. And that was what he did in the war. Wielding the reins of Karna's chariot, Salya did everything to distract his attention. Salya, having committed himself to fighting on the side of Kauravas, he should have honoured it. If however, he was willing to oppose the Pandavas, he should have openly told Duryodhana so, instead of fighting to respect Dharma.

55. Bear the Burden with a Smile

Man's most precious possession is the smile. No one in this world can escape without problems at some stage or the other. But one's ability depends on the manner in which one gathers strength to withstand them. A householder should bear the burden with a Smile. Unlike a person who is egotistic, timorous or boorish, one adorned with this gift, can spread cheer around him and bring happiness to every one. The attitude of facing even the worst hazards with a smile should be cultivated by all.

The duties of one leading a family but still enjoying divine bliss, are mentioned in the Bhagawatham. The same was conveyed to Yudhishtira by Narada. While outlining responsibilities of everyone who goes through the four stages: bachelor, married status, retiring years and total renunciation, just as Milk mixed with sugar turns more tasty and wholesome, a householder should acquire spiritual knowledge and devotion, a combination of which can make one's mind steady. Compassion and patience should be one's watchwords when handling issues.

The Narada—Yudhishtira dialogue refers to the need of a householder developing detachment. He should avoid accumulating wealth beyond a limit and spend the excess of his wealth on humanity. Externally, he can display all affection to the members of the family and make them believe that he is involved in the day-to-day affairs, but inwardly, he should be yearning to be in communion with the Almighty, through meditation. For this he should resist carnal cravings and realise the grandeur of the soul (atma), comparing with the decadence to which the human frame is subjected to.

If the body can be compared to a chariot, the soul is seated within. With intellect as the horse, man should gallop ahead, vanquishing the foes enroute—anger, greed, ego, malice and lust. If he fails to subdue them, the vehicle will be taken on a wrong direction. Another trait to be acquired by a householder is to keep reticent, refraining from participating in purposeless arguments. He should know that unwittingly, while doing his daily chores, he is the cause for the destruction of millions of microbes, insects and other living beings (when cooking, boiling water, or setting aflame the firewood). He should cringe for God's pardon by his worship, floral offerings, pious deeds and rites.

56. Performance of duties pleases God

The individual's duty to his family, to society, to his own higherself, etc. constitute his Dharma and performance of these duties pleases God most. The purpose of dharma is the stability of society, the maintenance of social order and the general welfare of mankind. And the individual on his part, attains perfection through performance of the duties that fall to his lot. This is the refrain of the Lord's teaching to Arjuna, in the Bhagavad Gita, conveyed to him on the battlefield of the Kurukshetra. All tasks are sacred and no vocation is ignoble or inferior. The cobbler and the carpenter serve the society as much as the teacher and the adminis-

trator, each in his own way, what is important is how he goes about his duties—whether he adheres to the moral principles of truth and justice while discharging them.

Scriptures lay great emphasis on the performance of one's duties to one's parents and one attains perfection merely performing these duties faithfully. A butcher leads an exemplary life, taught the moral to a scholarly brahmin and Sage Markandeya narrates the episode to the Pandava Princes. The name of the butcher is given as Dharmavyasa, befitting the virtuous life he had been leading, the hallmarks of which was his unswerving attendance on parents with intense love and devotion. The misguided brahmin who had developed some occult powers, thanks to his austerities, was stupefied when the butcher referred to his earlier encounter with an ideal housewife. The brahmin returned home and began to attend on his parents with love and care.

57. All duties are good to the unattached

Strength and manliness alone can lead to success both in material pursuits and spiritual quest. The Upanishads declare that realisation cannot be attained by the weak. Strength is life, weakness is death.

But even the strong and the brave give in to vacillation when their judgement is clouded by delusion. Only those who are attached to results grumble about the nature of the duties that have fallen to their lot. To the unattached, all duties are equally good and lend themselves to becoming efficient instruments with which selfishness can be destroyed and freedom of the soul secured. Performance of all duties without attachment makes one free from the resultant good or bad effects and hence from bondage. Sri Krishna has asked us to take him as a model in this regard. He engaged himself in various acts though he had nothing to gain and had no past Karma, the consequence of which had to be experienced.

In the Mahabharata, the valarous Arjuna, when faced with his teachers and relatives on the battlefield, displayed grief born of affection, which itself, was a product of illusory cognitions. "I belong to them" and "they are mine". As his crimination was eclipsed, Arjuna refused to fight, though he earlier undertook voluntarily to fight his opponents in fulfilment of the duty of a Kshatriya. Instead, he got ready to live a mendicant's life. All those whose minds are filled with grief and subjected to delusion might readily forsake the law of their life and resort to forbidden courses of action. Even when they live according to the proper law of their life (Swadharma), their activities are surely impelled by the desire for fruits therefrom which emanate from egoism (feelings of I and mine). Arjuna like a true disciple, surrendered himself at the feet of the Lord, who is known by the name of Govinda, the knower of the minds of the people and hence, who alone could rightly solve their life-problems. Through Arjuna, the Lord gave the message to mankind. The grace of the Lord always descended on the devotee in the hour of need. Arjuna prayed for enlightenment at a time of crisis and he got it.

58 Prime requisites of a devotee

Surrender to God and a keen desire to see Him face to face are the prime requisites of a devotee. But unless God himself chooses to grant us the divine insight, it is not possible to see Him. God's word is "Parvak" but it has to find expression among men in different times, places and situations and hence this communication in terms of language (Vaikhari) became diverse; different traditions arose but all of them stemmed from and led to the one and the same ultimate, in whatever terminology one may refer to it personal or impersonal. The diversity of traditions in a sacred text even within a single religion like Christianity and Hinduism resulted in the growth of scriptures and schools of interpretations. A seeker of truth should dive deep into the lines of the basic work, ponder and meditate on the teachings therein.

It was beside the point whether Lord Krishna and Arjuna and the discussions are historical. It was the dialogue of the Supreme self to the individual soul (jivatma). The second sloka of the prayer of Arjuna, witnessing the awe-inspiring form (Vishwaroopa) of the Lord, formed part of the Prayer and Pooja of the Lord. When Yudhishtira went to heaven, he saw Duryodhana there, already enjoying a regal status, according to the belief called "Veera Swargam", while the battle of Kurukshetra was fought to establish Dharma against Adharma as Duryodhana was portrayed as the symbol of evil and unrighteousness. Such ideas should be understood by taking the whole matter into consideration and the basic principles such as what was declared by the Lord in the Gita (Urdhwam gachanti, etc)—those established in Sattwa, ascended high and those of reprehensible activity (Tamasa), went down to the depths. Different schools of religion and philosophy pray each its own tattwas or categories. The more one propounded, the greater perhaps was his view that his philosophy was more significant. But the real tattwa is one—it should be sought by meditation, with the resolve (of Arjuna) "Drashtam inchami to rupam" i.e., "I desire to see you face to face".

59. How the Virtuous also Commit Sins

The Shastras caution man about the different ways sins descend upon him though he may not actually commit them. For instance, a virtuous partaking of the food offered by a wicked person shares the host's sins. That is the reason why a person performing a Yagna is warned against collecting contributions from persons who earn money through un-ethical means. Similarly, a person may not himself commit an offence. But if he chooses to be a silent spectator without resisting the commission of the offence, he has also to pay the price. He cannot escape retribution. To illustrate this point, Bheeshma, the great Yogi & gnani, called himself an accursed person for having been in the company of Duryodhana and his kinsmen. He cursed himself as one of those

guilty of attempt to rob and murder the Pandavas. In his prayer to the Lord from his death-bed, the grandsire praised His glory and His concern for the devotees. He described Him as the sole refuge.

Man's real strength lay in his ability to get the Almighty's grace. Arjuna, though a valorous archer, owed his success in the battle to Sri Krishna's protection. At the end of the battle, the Lord directed Arjuna to get off the chariot. Later, He unbridled the horses and He himself left the chariot whereupon it went up in flames. Because of the Lord, who donned the role of charioteer, the fierce shafts from veterans like Dronacharya and Bheeshma could do no harm.

60. Infinite Compassion of the Almighty

Why should God descend to the Earth from his abode? What is the intention of the Lord of the Universe in taking a human form and engaging Himself in a variety of activities? Whenever there is much unrighteousness in society and when irreligion and Adharma dominate, God makes His appearance. Avatara is a descent of God for the ascent of man. God's Avataras, through their actions and teachings produce a benign spiritual influence on human beings and help them in their gradual divine nature in man and make him rise above the petty, materialistic life of passion and egoism.

The all-merciful God, thanks to his infinite compassion makes the advent on the earth. He is taken on redeeming as many of His children as possible. We all belong only to Him and He is anxious we should all realise and establish our identity. How much happy a person will feel if he gets back his stolen ornaments. God feels the same way when a wayward person retraces his steps and turns towards Him.

He is most accessible to the pure hearted who have cultivated true love for Him. The simple, rustic cowherd

boys and girls took liberties with Sri Krishna who enjoyed his sport in their Company.

Sri Krishna is the greatest Karma Yogin of all time. He was the benefactor and friend of the poor and the underprivileged whom he protected from the oppressor. Embodiment of humility, the Lord of the Universe acted as the charioteer for Arjuna and washed the feet of the visitors voluntarily at the time of the Rajasooya Yagna performed by Yudhishtira.

Sri Krishna is the preceptor of preceptors. Life, both in its secular and sacred aspects, gets abundantly enriched by the application of the tenets of the Bhagavad Gita. The Geetacharya's immortal teachings to mankind on Karma Yoga, Bhakthi and Gnana through Arjuna and Udhava have no parallel in the world's religious literature. God, through his avataras, helps man to give up evil ways and tread the path of virtue with complete faith in Him.

61. Philosophic truths in a riddle

Among the several segments in the Mahabharata bringing out philosophic doctrines, the one containing the dialogue between the blind king, Dhritarashtra and the Sage Sanatsujata, is remarkable. The contents of the dialogue have relevance even today as they relate to the path to attain eternal bliss. By a verse, which is in the form of a riddle, Sanatsujata prescribes, "Ensuring two from one, controlling the three by four, overcoming the five, defeating the six, discarding the seven, man can enjoy bliss". It means that the Vedas are divided broadly into two parts—one revealing God and the other, giving His Injunctions. The Vedic literature explains that "Brahman" (the Supreme Being) is far superior in all respects to the soul (jiva). The "Sruti" is one but Brahman and Jiva are distinct. The latter undergoes changes.

The three constituents of life—Dharma, Artha and

Kama—should be sub-ordinated to the four—Dhana, Tapas, Japam, and Adhyayana. Wealth should be utilised for charitable purposes and man should not entertain sinful desires. Tapas should not be wasted to obtain temporary happiness.

A servant of God aspiring for release from bondage should control the five senses which ought to carry out his commands. To defeat the six, would mean conquering the foes within each one of us,—anger, lust, parsimony, greed, pride, and conceit. No doubt, they are formidable but all efforts should be made to crush them. When the bliss-seeker follows these instructions, his attachment towards the body, which is made of seven “dhatus” (elements) should gradually vanish. If the above principles were scrupulously followed, with conviction, the soul could attain moksha by the grace of God, which itself could be attained by spiritual knowledge, by constant meditation and with a guidance of a competent teacher.

The “manner of controlling the three by four” in the puzzle, it may be cited the third chapter of the Brahmasutras, the four denoting the sub-chapters dealing with detachment, devotion, knowledge and austerities.

62. Pious men always come out triumphantly

No one can escape facing problems or experiencing sufferings, if he is destined to be so. During such times, his privations and mental agony can be minimised, if he upholds the guidelines given in scriptures. God’s intention is to the world that pious men will remain unaffected even when subjected to serve tests and show exemplary courage and fortitude. God wants to demonstrate to the world that those who pin their faith in Him will ultimately emerge triumphant, without getting disheartened by vicissitudes. In this connection, the fate of the two stone blocks is often narrated by scholars. One of them, converted into an idol, was

consecrated and worshipped by millions of people. The other was discarded in front of the same shrine, exposed to sun and rain and was being used to break coconuts.

The radiance that a diamond reveals when it is cut, the brightness a copper vessel shows when polished, a garment getting whiter on washing and the mosaic flooring shining with more and more of grinding. Similarly, the traits of pious will be more lustrous by their undergoing trials, which will make them stand firm, even in the wake of adversities.

In this connection, a question is asked why Lord Krishna who was intimate with the Pandavas did not stop Yudhishtira from playing the game of dice from enabling him to win. Duryodhana adopted heinous methods to defeat him. God desired to bring out the honesty, tolerance and humility of Yudhishtira and how along with his brothers, he led a life of purity in the forest.

Duryodhana could be compared to a man seated on the edge of a branch on a tree, with his legs tied, the earth near the roots being constantly washed away by floods, but even at this juncture, teasing a few tigers which came there to quench their thirst.

63. Special prayers that bring rain

Faith being the Sheet-anchor of Hinduism, its followers firmly believe its scriptural injunctions and are aware that the guidelines and directives in them were prescribed by sages after they had tested their validity for years. Even in the days of the yore, the country faced droughts, floods and pestilence and people resorted to special prayers to mitigate them. When there was lack of timely rain they recited and expounded the Virata Parva, the Chapter in the Mahabharata which deals with the Pandavas stay in the Virata Kingdom incognito. Scholars who had mastered the Vedas, Chanted a special Mantram "Varuna Japam", invoking the Rain God for relief.

Why the Virata Parva is chosen for this propitiation was explained here. As soon as the Pandavas—who symbolised righteousness—entered this territory, prosperity started smilingly on it, through a rich harvest, after copious rain. Bheeshma refers to the fact that where the Pandvas resided there was no scope for nature playing truant. Secondly, the scriptures say that if celestials change their form and assume new roles, there is bound to be rain. While entering the new kingdom after having spent 12 years in the forests, the Pandavas (celestial being in human form) took different assignments in the Palace. Varuna, another celestial, is said to have welcomed them and showed his reverence by emptying the clouds.

The Virata Parva spells out two lessons: men of integrity never rely on their scholastic and other distinctions but count on God's blessing at every stage. Also those who are intelligent and possess ample prowess, will try to encourage the less-valiant as Arjuna did in the case of the Virata Prince.

The Varuna Mantram, in the Krishna Yajurveda, consists of 700 syllables and if chanted slowly and with clarity, it may take about eight minutes; it has to be repeated 108 times by individuals or groups, either continuously or at intervals. The study of Virata Parva and the chanting of Varuna Japam by qualified men, help to bring rain.

64. Advice against giving way to anguish

Pessimism and cowardice are man's threats from within. Even when pious people when seized by grief, are apt to turn imbeciles. Mental anguish will eat away a man's Vitals. On the other hand, one who faces problems without losing courage, taking things in their stride, is bound to prosper.

A man of composure goes about his job unmindful of the obstacles as he knows that they are part of the pattern of

one's life. He places absolute reliance on God as it is inevitable to get rid of grief totally. Also the fact that some others have undergone worse trials and have stood upto them should give him solace.

The embodiment of patience and his brothers, during their stay in the forests, felt disturbed when one of them, Arjuna, who had gone to secure Pasupatam from Lord Shiva, failed to return in time. Sage Brihadaswa comforted them, saying that it would be unwise for men wedded to Dharma, to get discouraged. The sage narrated to the Pandavas the story of King Nala who lost his empire, his wife and his reputation and was forced to work as syce. On the other hand, the sage said, Yudhishtira was lucky and he had brothers who could share his agony. The sage also advised the eldest of the Pandavas not to be panicked if he were to be invited again to play a game of dice. Fear-psychosis would gradually ruin a man's health. Saints and seers had charted the course for a righteous person to swim against the swift current of life. The sage also narrated the story of Harischandra and taught Yudhishtira a special Mantra with which he could make the correct calculations while playing the game.

65. How to keep out evil thoughts

A moment of introspection is enough to reveal the plethora of bad traits that one possesses. The Mental and Physical faculties, with which one is endowed are often misused. Backbiting, abusing, lying and vain talk are among the common vices. Much of what the eye sees is debasing and pernicious. The hands are employed more for acts against the norms of noble conduct. Worse than all, these are the wrongs that relate to one's mind. The feeling that his sinful thoughts cannot be perceived by others effectively muffles the already feeble voice of conscience and induces a person to the wrong way.

The most effective method of pulling the sensory

organs away from the evil propensities is gradually to direct them towards God and associate them in the service of the Lord—uttering divine names, singing His glory, feasting one's eyes on his enchanting form, offering flowers at His feet as Saint Thyagaraja says in his Kriti "Ennaga Manasuku raani". Yudhishtira's dedication to Sri Krishna was absolute and his faith unflinching. He sought the advice of the Lord on everything and followed it. Yudhishtira was in a dilemma when Sage Narada conveyed to him the desire of Pandu that he should perform the Raja Sooya Yaga. On being told by Sri Krishna that it would require vanquishing Jarasandha, a formidable foe, Yudhishtira almost gave it up as an impossible task. When he left the decision to Sri Krishna, the latter Himself undertook the responsibility of removing the obstacle and ensuring the successful performance of the Yaga. The Lord had Jarasandha killed by Bheema.

66. Moral law should not be violated

The moral law—as in the case of other legislations—lends scope for different interpretations. To avoid confusion, sages and saints have cleared all doubts and misgivings, which may arise from them, so that human ingenuity will not alter the rules to suit their convenience. It may be invariably seen that some people, who feel it irksome to uphold the rules governing good conduct, may try to take advantage of the exceptions provided therein. On the other hand the rules should never be violated and it is this firm Conviction that has enabled people to maintain discipline and character. The Mahabharata illustrates this by explaining the unwritten understanding among the five brothers that when Draupadi stayed with one among them, others would not enter their chambers. It so happened that Arjuna was compelled to visit Yudhishtira's apartment when Draupadi was there and he volunteered to undergo the punishment—to go on a pilgrimage.

Here an episode may be cited relating to the four fledglings, deserted by their parent—birds when a fire engul-

fed their forest abode. Undaunted, they continued to stay in the hole of a tree. They prayed, without losing their morale, to the sun-God relying on their moral strength and they were spared by the engulfing flames thereby showing that "Self" alone is man's friend and as well as his foe.

67. Egotism deadly foe of the great

As one progresses in life, occupying higher posts and wielding greater authority, he has to exercise great self-restraint. Newly acquired glory may blind his eyes. Intoxicated with power, he may commit grave mistakes for which he may have to pay dearly. Egotism is man's worst enemy. One must be ever wary of its harmful influence. Even great men may succumb to it. In the Mahabharata epic, King Nahusha's example can be cited here. It is a classic example. The great emperor that he was, he performed 10 Ashwamedha Yajnas, the greatest among sacrifices. As a result, he occupied the throne of Devendra, the chief of the Gods. While moving in a palanquin, carried by the seven sages, he ordered sage Agasthya, one among them, to proceed faster. The enraged sage cursed him to become a serpent.

This Nahusha episode also illustrated the moral that one can ill-afford to insult a godly person. Offending God is a less heinous sin. Causing offence to saintly persons will bring disaster. Saintly persons devote their lives for the welfare of mankind. By thought, word and deed, they always do good to others. They are dearest to God. Erring persons are corrected by them and their curses are meant only to serve that purpose.

68. God stands by the righteous

The powerful influence exerted by destiny directly and at times unseen, forms one of the topics frequently focussed in the Mahabharata. The five brothers represent patience and restraint while their cousins symbolise evil

Firmly wedded to virtue and having kept the sense faculties under control, why should the former,—the Pandavas be made to undergo privations while their cousins went scot-free, despite their misdeeds, committed deliberately? That God always stands by the righteous and removes their distress while he punishes the wicked have been clearly established from the events contained in the epic.

A person will be prompted to do only good by listening to the qualities of Yudhishtira will be rid of sins by analysing the events in the life of Bheema, be freed from fear if Arjuna is remembered and be relieved of diseases by meditating on Nakula and Sahadeva. Behind them was Lord Krishna, who acted as their constant guide. The epic clearly details the manner in which the jealous Duryodhana and his associates tried to get rid of them. Hence when the blind King Dhritarashtra learnt about their safety and also of their success in the "Swayamvaram", he was unhappy though he pretended to be delighted, revealing an instance of typical hypocrisy.

Though circumstances conspired that all the five should marry Draupadi, it was ordained by God that she would reside with them by turns, that too after having been totally purified and virtually taking a new lease of life, at the end of each year. Also the other four would not intrude on her privacy during her stay with the fifth. She was a divine manifestation deputed to serve as the cause of the destruction of evil. The epic incorporates several anecdotes to highlight the consequences of giving room to anger, passion and jealousy. To avert any misunderstanding among five brothers and to point out how even those who are very intimate can fall out over a woman, an instance is mentioned about a woman of extra-ordinary charm, for whose sake, two brothers, who till then remained unaffected by any worldly pulls, started yielding to lust and resorted to quarrelling over her and ultimately perished.

69. Upholder of Virtue, a true devotee

The acid test to find out real intentions of a person who is desirous of upholding moral law (broadly termed Dharma) is whether he can resist desires, temptations and undue attachment. The affinity to one's kith and kin is but natural and it is common that given an opportunity, one is bound to protect one's brothers and parents & those close to him and save them from even extremely dangerous situations. But one who upholds the law of virtue, unmindful of the consequences, is a true devotee whom God likes to embrace. Such a splendid character, whose tenacious efforts to follow only the righteous path, was Yudhishtira in the great epic, Mahabharata. When invited to answer certain delicate questions on human conduct and ethics, in spite of his knowledge and experience about worldly affairs, he in all humility, said he would try and never displayed an arrogance arising out of intellectual attainments.

Yudhishtira's four brothers—two of them uterine and the other, his step-mother's sons, lay unconscious, having tasted the water of a poisoned pool, defying the advice of an incorporeal voice. Yudhishtira answered the queries raised by this unseen body and in return, he was given the option, to get one of the four revived. He chose one of the step-brothers and the Yaksha wondered why he did not pick one of his own brothers, known for their wisdom and valour. "It will be against the law of Dharma, if I am able to resuscitate one of the two step-brothers, his mother Madri will be happy. Otherwise, she will feel sorry at my partiality. He was given a second choice to choose either Bheema or Arjuna, but even then, he preferred the second step-brother. Yudhishtira won the test and all his brothers were revived.

Among the important statements of Yudhishtira in the dialogue were : The earth is like a pan, the sun and moon being the heaters, frying the humanity night and day; peace of mind can be obtained by giving up desire; mind is faster than wind; the world is sustained by the law of Righteous;

the mother is greater than earth; and the father is greater than the sky; happiness is ensured when one gives up anger: even though several deaths take place daily around us, still many think that they will live forever.

70. The aim of having Children

Procreation which is but a biological process for the perpetuation of the species, has a nobler purpose to serve in so far as it relates to human beings—that is, to maintain uninterruptedly the chain of Dharma being practised over generations. The emphasis is therefore on the quality of the progeny rather than its quantity. The Vedic incantations and rituals that go with the marriage ceremony are intended to invoke Divine blessings for obtaining good children and ensuring their prosperity. Couples are also known to offer special prayers, undertake pilgrimages and observe spiritual regimen for the purpose. A virtuous son, though short-lived is preferable to a wicked or truant one, destined to live for long, as illustrated by the choice, made by Aryamba, mother of Adi Shankaracharya. When king Pandu was subjected to a curse that forbade him joining his wife, he was stricken with grief because the family lineage would snap after him. The mantra, his wife Kunti had secured from Sage Durvasa, came as a boon to him. By using it, Kunti and Pandu's other wife, Madri, bore him five sons—the Pandavas.

Pandu was overjoyed on his having had five sons, despite his handicap, and in a moment of elation, overstepped his limits—a mistake that cost him his life. Extreme happiness was an intoxicant, which made an individual throw to the winds all caution and restraint. His mind, held under check with great difficulty would give him the slip and succumb to temptations in that unguarded moment.

71. Problems that face righteous men

Mind may be compared to a battle-ground on which a constant conflict continues between vice and virtue. With

all powers at his command, an honest person may endeavour to think of good deeds only and follow the code of Dharma but yet, by force of circumstances, he may be compelled to do exactly the opposite acts. On other occasions, he may know a particular act to be a sin or in contravention of morality but much against his conscience, he will have to reluctantly carry it out. Such paradoxical situations will always confront men who are sincere in their efforts to adhere to righteousness and they will not fail to face problems with fortitude. The only cause that can be traced for their grief, which they will never reveal but put up with cheer, is their destiny. But in the midst of their sufferings and problems, they will approach God, offer their surrender, express their helplessness and seek His guidance. It is equally certain that God will never let down such people. The Pandavas were exemplars of Dharma but were subjected to ruthless attack by wicked elements but they were always rescued by Lord Krishna. The illustrious forbears of the Pandavas Sage Parasara made Satyawati marry King Santhanu for maintaining the Royal lineage. There was however, a strange condition that only sons born to her should ascend the throne and for this, Devavrata, Santhanu's ward through the first wife, gave up all his claims and took a vow to remain a celibate throughout his life—a sacrifice that has no parallel and for which he was hailed as Bheeshma.

72. The role of a family man

The segmentation of man's life-span into four major disciplines is not only intended to make him realise his rights and responsibilities but to gradually develop an attitude of detachment and renunciation, resulting in realisation of God. As a bachelor (Brahmachari) his prime concern is to acquire spiritual knowledge and condition his mind as not to yield to temptations. The next stage "Grihastashrama" where he has to meet, with stiff challenges and face conflicting interests and deal with oppositions, is intended to maintain the continuity of progeny. He should not mistake it as an arrangement for mere carnal gratification and thereby get

immersed in the vanishing pleasures. He has to maintain his dependents, shedding his conceit, ego and anger, he should develop love and affection and in this, his spiritual exercises will help him. As he gets older and his family enlarges, he should reduce his wants and gradually dissociate himself from worldly activities. He will then reach next step where he should remain absolutely unconcerned about happenings around. The final state of Sanyasa can be practiced only by the chosen few.

The epic Mahabharata lays emphasis on the significance of going through the family life to get mellowed. The opening refrain itself illustrated this aspect by mentioning how Parasara, a sage known for his erudition, felt the necessity to marry a celestial woman. The son born to them was Dwaipayana through whom the kuru dynasty prospered. The valuable piece of advice which Parasara gave to Dwaipayana was about the respect to be shown to parents and the implicit obedience to mother's wishes.

73. Adherence to Code of Dharma

“God is all-pervasive and hence all creatures should be looked upon with equanimity. One must take the ups and downs in life in one's stride, since they are the inescapable consequences of one's past acts”. Persons endowed with the gift of the gab can go on talking in this vein for hours, by the sheer skill of oratory and eloquence, they may also be able to carry their audience with them to the point of casting a hypnotic spell. But it is doubtful if any of them will have succeeded in acting upon what he is preaching, for that is no easy task. The real test to an individual's ability to retain composure comes when he is thrown into a sea of adversities. Whoever sticks to the path of righteousness and displays remarkable patience is worthy of all praise and emulation. Emperor Nala's greatness lay in the fact though he was toppled from the dizzy heights of affluence and power into the abysmal depths of penury and had to face trials and

tribulations, he did not deflect from Dharma. He endured all the suffering with supreme fortitude.

Whatever be the position one occupied, one's aim should be to stick to virtuous ways, never allowing the mind to be swayed either by happiness or sorrow. That Nala, though subjected to greater hardships, adhered steadfastly to the code of Dharma and ultimately emerged in all his resplendent glory came as a source of strength and courage to Yudhishtira, whose moral, had sagged momentarily when Arjuna was away doing penance to obtain Pasupathastra.

74. Virtue always triumphs

God has absolutely no partiality towards any of His creations. Devotees Who place total reliance on Him and believe that He alone is the ultimate refuge and demonstrate their utter sincerity by words and deeds, are certainly entitled to be extricated from any predicament and will be in his good books. As a token of his affection, God will bestow favours or boons as the occasion demands. God considers those persons who cause injury to his devotees as His enemies and punishes them suitably.

Indicating how virtue, will always triumph, Mahabharata provides an account of the genius of planning, administrative ability and political sagacity of God in human form. The Pandavas symbolising righteousness, sought Lord Krishna's approval for every one of their acts. At the same time, they did not fail to carry out the duties enjoined upon them. Their only anxiety was to tread the path of Dharma, come what may. To them God was extremely considerate, readily responding to their entreaties. At the same time, Sri Krishna tried to reform the arrogant Duryodhana by providing him with plenty of opportunities to correct himself but he was adamant in tormenting the noble Pandavas. Innumerable moral doctrines are inlaid in the epic of Mahabharata. No doubt, some of the norms might have to be reviewed in the light of changing context but basic tenets like the triumph.

of truth and non-violence were of eternal value. Sage Vyasa, through one lakh verses projected the doctrine of surrender in this monumental work.

75. Effective ways to avoid sinful acts

A steep fall from the pinnacle of power and social status, strained relations with kith and kin; sudden deprivation of wealth; being subjected to character-assassination-these and other adversities, which rob a person of his mental peace and plunge him to misery are the result of his sinful acts. The remedy, therefore, lies in expiating for the misdeeds and in acquiring punya by engaging himself in acts of Virtue. Just as diseases attack an individual when his body lacks-resistance power, the effects of sins assail him vehemently when the stock of Punya with him gets depleted. He has to get spiritually re-charged and fortified against the malefic consequences of wrong deeds he had already committed. Among the effective methods of doing so are associating oneself with noble souls, chanting the names of God, visiting holy centres and listening to expositions of God's attributes.

While Yudhishtira had the good fortune of listening to the story of Emperor Nala from Sage Brihadaswa. Bheema had the opportunity of knowing about Sri Rama from Anjaneya, whom he met while on an errand to fetch a rare flower for Draupadi. During his exile, Yudhishtira made it a point to mingle with sages and visit hollowed spots so that he, would gain spiritual strength. He blamed himself, not Duryodhana, for all his hardships.

76. The wisdom of elders

Men of eminence, who have distinguished themselves by their spiritual knowledge, impeccable character and noble conduct, must be respected & the tendency to treat elders with contempt and indifference curbed. Though old people may not, in all cases, be learned according to common standards,

they are likely to possess an uncanny intuition, which together with the rich worldly experience they have, lends weight to their views. One will stand to gain, not lose, by following the advice they offer. Sometimes they may not be explicit in warning an individual of an impending danger and suggesting the way of escaping it. It is for him to be alert to take the hint, use his intellect to grasp the real importance of the message and act on it. Yudhishtira came to know of Duryodhana's plot to burn him and his brothers alive in wax palace, because of hint thrown by Vidura, who also indicated, in the form of a riddle, how they could escape from the trap.

Yudhishtira and Duryodhana were poles apart in their attitudes and qualities. While Duryodhana was filled with jealousy towards the Pandavas for no plausible reason, Yudhishtira was compassionate in the extreme. He never harboured any ill will towards Duryodhana in spite of all the attempts the latter made to do away with the Pandavas. At no stage, he asked Duryodhana even casually about them. An individual should not think of doing harm to any one even if he had been wronged. Instead of getting angry with the offender and trying to take revenge on him, he should learn to sympathise with him for straying into wrong path.

77. Everything is possible with divine help

Certain statement in the scriptural lore may seem to be contradictory in nature but on such puzzling situations, suitable explanations would be forthcoming from sages and saints about the purpose of these utterances. The principal Vedic directive is "Obey your mother". Imagine that if her words in a particular context, are not so palatable, should they be followed? Generally, in such circumstances, God will help his devotees and guide them as how to behave.

In the Mahabharata, such a predicament arose but God never let down His devotees. When Draupadi was married to the Pandavas and was led to their home, Kunti, not realis-

ing the arrival of an additional member, blessed them, as was usual for her, to share what they had brought; But the arrival on the spot of Sage Vyasa who had the greatest gift of knowing the past resulted in solving the mystery. He was able to realise the details relating to the previous birth of Draupadi and how she was compelled to marry five men.

By virtue of her purity and spiritual strength, she would remain with each by turns. Vyasa had the rare power to look back and he did so on another occasion also, to enable Gandhari to see her lost sons. Even now if we are able to "tune" our thoughts acquiring certain powers, it may be possible to recapture scenes like that of the Lord delivering the Gita in Kurukshetra. There is nothing that can not be achieved if God so wills.

In the first meeting of the Pandavas with Lord Krishna, He gave His approval, by a nod, and made Arjuna join the contest to marry Draupadi and succeed when all others failed. At the time when Kuchela left the Lord's place after having offered his salutations to Him, a fleeting smile enabled Kuchela to have his poverty wiped out. The manner in which human beings can enjoy and derive joy by worshipping the smiling, charming idol of Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi has been presented by Purandaradasa in a song. That God bows to devotees, when they invoke His benedictions, through chanting and glorifying him by singing, had been proved beyond doubt through the lives of Draupada, Drona, Draupadi, the Pandavas and others.

78. Process of evolution into divine being

Before it has come to be accepted, the Hindu doctrine of rebirth has undergone severe tests through the ages, at the hands of sages and saints. The tenet is that the soul, in each of its earthly existence, is given a form and by its own good or bad deeds, jumps into another "Cage" (body), governed by the process of evolution. It passes through various stages—taking birth as an insect, worm, bird and beast—and is cau-

sed to be born as a human being ultimately. Born as man or woman, it is provided with an opportunity to rise to the level of a divine being but all cannot achieve this state. Total liberation is only granted to a few.

A human being therefore should strive to achieve perfection. By his pious acts, he tastes their fruits and by his wicked deeds he suffers the consequences in his subsequent births. An example often cited is the reappearance as a dog, either as a stray one, loitering in the streets or as a pet animal lying in the lap of a rich man, enjoying all comforts, depending on its past. God however, urges man to do his duty sincerely and surrender the fruits thereof to God himself.

In the epic, Mahabharata, perhaps the best beneficiary of the Lord's advice was Karna, who discharged his obligations to the best of his ability. As a warrior, he fought with all ferocity and as a friend, he repaid his debt of gratitude to Duryodhana and as the greatest philanthropist, he unhesitatingly donated the fruits of his charity to God Himself. Karna declined to accept any boon from God as that would imply another birth, to enjoy it. He sought salvation but pleaded that in case the Lord insisted on granting it, he should be extended the privilege of "not saying no" to any one who sought alms or gifts from him. His act of giving was marked by spontaneity and instantaneous.

79. God will never fail those seeking shelter

"The heavens may fall, the Himalayas may spilt, the earth may show fissures, the waters of the ocean may dry, but My words shall never go in Vain or unimplemented," says God in His incarnation as Sri Krishna, only to assure humanity that He will never fail to protect those who seek shelter in Him. The above solemn pledge was given by Him to console the grief-stricken Draupadi who had a feeling that her vow may go unfulfilled as evidenced by the sudden conciliatory attitude displayed by the Pandavas.

Centuries have elapsed but still people of this country stand under the spell of the epic, Mahabharata. There is many different strand woven into the texture of our civilization and culture dating back to hoary antiquity. The centre of the vast pile of Sanskrit literature is this monumental poem of divine inspiration, unapproachable and far removed from human comprehension.

The epic, Mahabharata, establishes the strongest link between the old and new India. Mahabharata is a work that recounts the war-like deeds of our ancestors, the God-like heroes and heroines, the uncompromising and unrighteous acts of the group, called the Kauravas abetted by sycophants and the peace-loving and God fearing and law-abiding Pandavas, who were constantly guided by Lord Krishna. The heroine Draupadi sprang from a fire altar. The purity of Draupadi was due to this special religious rite performed by her father. She was endowed with extra-ordinary powers, intelligence, determination and forbearance. In her has been portrayed gracious woman hood, staunch loyalty, absolute chastity and Supreme sacrifice.

Many points were discussed, raised by the five brothers, about their future after they had successfully completed their exile. On their behalf, Lord Krishna was ready to embark on a peace mission. Draupadi felt that no one was concerned about the grim vow she had taken against those who had tried to wrong her. It was at that juncture that Lord Krishna comforted her saying that He would see her duly rewarded.

80. Need to adhere to truth and justice

Social, moral and other obligations of a person, in his individual capacity and in his relation to society, differ considerably. In personal life, he has the choice to adopt any pattern he likes but he cannot apply the same when in the midst of a congregation. As an administrator, one has a tremendous responsibility to act without fear or favour and do-

nate liberally to the cause of the poor and the down trodden. Deprived of his status, the same person will have no opportunity to display his generosity. But in power or out of it, he has to maintain his balance, adhere to the laws of righteousness and stick to ahimsa, truth and justice. Being alone, one gets a chance to cleanse the impurities in his mind by resorting to meditation, recitation of hymns and offering worship.

In the Mahabharata, defeated in a game of dice, and asked to go on exile to the forest, Yudhishtira showed no malice or rancour, but took it cheerfully as a command of his uncle, the blind King, and as destiny's stroke. As a King, he had won laurels for his efficiency and philanthropy, but stripped of his position, his only regret was his inability to support the sages accompanying him. Yudhishtira advised his brothers who were bitter about the trend of events, not to blame Duryodhana or his associates, but to put up with the suffering. Sri Krishna too, who visited them after a considerable time, was indignant at the treatment meted out to them and wanted to punish the culprits but Yudhishtira pacified Him.

81. Magnanimity of the Learned

Men of learning deserve to be treated with utmost respect. They cannot be trifled with, and anyone causing offence to them, cannot but come to grief. Persons enjoying newly-acquired power and position, should be particularly careful as they are prone to become haughty and arrogant. King Drupada presents a classic example. He paid dearly for his grievous mistake of ill-treating his former friend and fellow student the great Drona when the latter went to meet him.

When Drupada was brought captive by his illustrious student, Arjuna, the great master treated the King magnanimously and said he wanted to continue his friendship with him. That is the way, the really learned behave. Again, such exalted persons perform the duties that have fallen to

their lot (swadharma) with absolute earnestness and a sense of dedication. No extraneous considerations influence them.

A teacher should impart his knowledge to any one who approaches him with sincerity. The great Dronacharya, thanks to his attainments, could foresee that prince Drushtadumnya, Drupad's son, would cause his death in the historic battle, Kurukshetra. He was not at all perturbed and the unrivalled master of archery taught him the art. He also knew that destiny could not be changed and the human body was bound to perish.

82. The wise distinguish body from Soul

Any one who realises that the body, which is perishable, is not identical with the soul that resides within and which is immortal, never worries about the turmoil he undergoes or about his end. The body is destined to be vanquished. It changes but the soul within exists permanently, remaining the same at all times. The imperishable 'self' (soul) that inhabits the impermanent body, pervades the Universe, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna when the latter stood bewildered at the tragic consequences of the Kurukshetra battle.

The Bhagawad Gita presents to the devotee a vision of the Supreme, tells the devotee how to discover God, how to recognise Him and how to reach his abode. Anguish seized Arjuna & his heart sank at the sight of vulnerable men gathered for fratricidal carnage. It was then that the Lord delivered the message of 'duty', unmindful of the results. Attachment is the essence of ignorance. If that is severed, wisdom will dawn. Free from the pairs of the opposites, from the care of the success or failure, man should hitch himself to the star of freedom from the cycle of birth and death. The Gita is essentially a text book of rationalism, its sole purpose, being to arouse and establish the highest intelligence and spiritual understanding.

The Gita reveals itself according to the capacity of the reader. It teaches us about the acquisition of knowledge without hankering for reward, knowledge based on self-introspection with the help of meditation, devotional service and total resignation at the lotus feet of God. Sri Krishna tells that despondency of Arjuna was due to excessive attachment to his kith and kin. When the fire of divine service was kindled with transcendental knowledge about the relationship of the individual soul with the cosmic soul, the thirst for worldly enjoyment would cease.

83. Justice always triumphs

The different episodes in the Mahabharata present the philosophical, spiritual and cultural wisdom of ancient India, every being pregnant with morals. The main theme that runs through the epic is that truth shall prevail and justice shall always triumph. The narratives pinpoint that one who upholds Dharma shall certainly receive God's protection. The Pandavas who symbolise virtue, have zealously carried out their duties, unmindful of the hazards. The epic's epitome is reflected by the sentiments expressed by each of the five brothers.

Yudhishtira says he will treat every woman other than his wife as his sister and consider wealth that belongs to others, and not earned by his own labour, as mere stones. Bhima declares that even at the cost of his life, he will maintain dignity and honour. Arjuna asserts that with the avidity of a cow, waiting for fresh green fodder he will endeavour to put down vice and adharma. Nakula points out that one who follows the law of righteousness, will be endowed with knowledge. Sahadeva claims that Truth, wisdom, Dharma, compassion, patience and forgiveness are his close relatives. All of them voice the opinion that Dharma will always emerge victorious and evil will perish.

Once Sahadeva found himself in a peculiar predicament. when the Kurukshetra was about to commence,

Duryodhana from the opposite camp pleaded with him secretly to prescribe him the most auspicious day when he could march his army and gain success. Turning down Duryodhana's request would amount to breaking a promise while acceding to it would spell ruin to himself and his brothers. Still, he fixed the date and then meditated on Lord Krishna to forgive him. By a clever manipulation, the Lord advanced the auspicious time, duping Duryodhana and saving the Pandavas. The Lord offers asylum to sincere devotees.

In this epic, mention is made of the Supreme sacrifice of Bhishma and the manner in which he had carried out responsibilities entrusted to him. He was confronted with the task of fighting his grandsons—the Pandavas. When Duryodhana accused him of being partial to them, he vowed to wipe them out the next day, by which time, Lord Krishna, by a clever plan, deprived him of his rare arrow.

84. Happy is one who gives up desires

Never are desires gratified. To attempt to do so will be like putting out fire by pouring tons of ghee over it. All the grain and corn, all the gold and cattle, and women will not suffice to satiate a man. "The best method to deal with cravings is to give them up altogether". Happy is one who gets cured of this disease. These words of advice were not by any sage but by a king who himself was a victim of lust. Even having turned old, he was not able to resist temptations and suppress his lust. As he was told that he could enjoy the worldly pleasures for some more years if some young man obliged to transfer his youth to him. He begged of his sons, but they rejected his request. The last one however, agreed and the king got back his youth. Later, he saw the worthlessness of the vanishing pleasures and exchanged his status, installed the dutiful son on the throne and tendered him the above moral. That was Yayati. The episode is integrated in the epic of the Mahabharata not only to demonstrate the implicit obedience of a son to the command of his

father but the purposeless pursuit of pleasures and the consequent repercussions.

The epic also portrays the supreme sacrifice made by a son to help his father to get remarried. Mention is made here of the grim determination of the prince, who on coming to know that his marriage would be an impediment to his father marrying a girl of his choice as a second wife, took a vow to remain a celibate throughout his life. For this unbelievable act, Prince Devavrata earned the name of Bheeshma. This was a rare instance of a youngman refusing to succumb to carnal cravings. The Mahabharata is a work of everlasting value. Containing numerous illustrations to highlight the value of morality. More important is the extreme reverence to be shown towards a spiritual guide. Two stories describe how two disciples tried to please their preceptors by implicit obedience and by even preparing to give up their lives, to carry out their (preceptor's) wishes.

85. Significance of 'Swadharma'

Spiritual powers should always be used for beneficial measures and not for destructive purposes. Saints and sages, despite their intense penance, never boasted of the moral strength they had derived through such religious discipline. On the other hand, they applied the same to uphold the traditions, to shed ego and to meditate.

A Youngman who had acquired extra-ordinary powers once found his peace being disturbed and traced the cause to a crane. His angry look made the bird fall down. But he tried to display the same to a woman known for her chastity but she said "I am no crane". Later he went to a butcher who was so deeply engrossed in his work that he failed to take cognizance of his presence. But after some time he sought to know from him whether he was sent by the woman whom he had tried to curse. The shocked saint

wondered how the butcher could recall these incidents and read what transpired in his mind so correctly.

The butcher's success in life was due to his service to his aged parents. He maintained his house in a trim condition and had taken every care to attend to their comforts. Before commencing his day's work and after closing the shop, he knelt at their feet. His affection to the aged couple enabled him to receive their blessings and thus he could face any threat. This story was related by Sage Markandeya to Yudhishtira in the Mahabharata to highlight the significance of 'Swadharma'—everyone taking pleasure in adhering to the duties enjoined upon him.

There is a dialogue between Draupadi and Satyabhama, wife of Sri Krishna. The former assured her that she used no talisman nor applied any 'Charm' nor chanted any mantra to win the affection of her husbands. The warmth of affection of a woman, the patience she exhibits by overlooking her spouse's weaknesses, serving him with dedication, sacrificing her self-interest & understanding his moods, will all make him virtually a slave. A woman should never entertain the idea of dominating her husband or display her sense of assertion.

86. Remember Him at the hour of need

Perhaps the greatest paradox in this world is the suffering of men considered nearer to God by virtue of their righteous conduct, piety and respect of tradition. Why should they be subjected to severe trials when they faithfully discharge their duties in accordance with the scriptural constitution? This question was raised even centuries ago by Bhishma, the noblest character in the Mahabharata.

Bheeshma, lying on his death-bed, asked Lord Krishna why his close associates, the Pandavas, who had zealously upheld Dharma, had to face, ordeals. Why did he allow them to go through a period of torture and severe stress. It

is here that the Lord's reply assumes greatest significance. He said that the power of illusion had a greater stranglehold even on Himself, born as a man. His law was inexorable and it would operate even without Him. People could not escape the consequences of their past deeds and Destiny could never be defied by any one.

But Lord Krishna has said the agony can certainly be mitigated if people cling to him, display their devotion and seek refuge in Him. 'Remember me in the midst of suffering and the crisis will blow over', He has uttered. The classic example was that of Draupadi to whose rescue God rushed at the hour of need.

Righteous discipline was essential to cultivate such a staunch faith. One should abjure vain glory and never indulge in self-publicity. A person should not only forget the good things he has done to others but also continue to remain good to others.

87. Devotion will help solve birth's mystery

Often times, man when beset with innumerable problems, wonders why he should have been caused to be born at all. No one can escape trials and tribulations. God himself has given a suitable reply in his sermons, why man suffers. The usual consolation that the man in agony derives is that 'they are but the Almighty's pastimes'. To understand the mystery behind one's birth, five important factors should be digested. The foremost is to know the purpose of one's birth. Saints pleaded with God to provide an answer to this puzzle. They also went a bit further and urged Him 'None can question your action in making us appear in this world. But please spare us, at least from now on, from rebirths. Should however you think we have to go through another ordeal (further birth), please grant us the power to ever remember you and meditate on you'.

There is the need to cast off the fear of death, which

is but natural phenomenon and which puts an end to our distress. But death should make us all realise how no one will accompany us in our journey beyond our life. The holes that the son makes in the pot at the time of lighting the funeral pyre represents the getting rid of the dead man's links with his desire for wealth, for property and for women. The fruits of our good acts alone will shadow us in our life-hereafter. We should realise that as we grow old, our mental and physical faculties will fail and we will turn senile when our very presence in the family may be despised. We should take steps to maintain our health as none will extend the relief needed when we become infirm. With all these warnings, some may still harbour vain desires and display attachment towards pleasures even as age advances.

The Mahabharata cites the example of Emperor Yayati who was eager to exchange his old age and to become young to enjoy the company of a bewitching woman. His son agreed to the transfer to make his father happy. Devotion, detachment, upholding of righteousness and succour to the needy through liberal gifts are the steps to face life.

88. Futile to resist Divine will

Trials and tribulations are part of a man's life. However, some people, presuming that they have the strength to resist even divine commands, endeavour to ward them off, but fail before God's will. Wisdom lies in submitting oneself to the dictates of the Almighty and seek His grace. Quite often, what is considered baneful, may turn out to be beneficial. Even a curse can become a boon to those who respect Dharma and are Godly. The Mahabharata reiterates this by describing the Vicissitudes of the Pandavas and their ultimate triumph.

In this epic, it is narrated how the successful manner in which the five brothers and Draupadi concealed their identity and served in the palace of King Virata for a Year. Arjuna was chosen to teach the fine arts to the princess. A

warrior who had no equal was transformed into a eunuch temporarily, enabling him to gain entry into women's apartments.

While on a pilgrimage, as atonement for having intruded on the privacy of his brother and Draupadi, Arjuna was accosted by a celestial damsel. For not acceding to her plea, he was cursed to undergo the sexual change for a limited period. This proved advantageous to Arjuna, at the needed hour.

The worst sufferer was Draupadi, whose dazzle and charm attracted everyone, including the evil-minded commander-in-chief, Keechaka. He was punished by Bheema, disguised as a cook, when he made amorous advances to her.

89. Why even the wise suffer

While it is necessary to punish unscrupulous elements for violation of moral injunctions, why should men of integrity and piety who faithfully follow the rules of righteousness, be made to suffer—is a question often posed. No doubt that such great men, wedded to virtue may, by their display of their intense devotion, might have secured freedom from rebirth but for certain acts of omission which they might have committed even without their knowledge, they are made to reap the results in this life-span itself.

Yudhishtira, the key figure of Mahabharata, is portrayed as the symbol of Dharma. He had brothers who could face any problem and what more, he had the guidance of Lord Krishna—yet he was put to severe tests for a long time. The same doubt was raised by Bheeshma who had discharged his obligations satisfactorily and never wounded the sentiments of any one.

Sage Vyasa reminded him of his association with wicked men like Duryodhana who attempted to strip Draupadi, a devotee in public. He should have protested or at least,

could have left their company but remained a mute witness. Even today, God-believers are being advised to avoid being present in places where God or God-men are denigrated. 'Bheeshma stuti' is very significant, where the warrior praised Lord Krishna's mercy towards him inspite of his antagonism shown in the war.

90. Righteous men win Laurels

There need be no room for despair when a person faces misery as it is bound to be succeeded by happiness. But he can treat both joy and sorrow alike by strict adherence to the code of ethics laid down in scriptural texts. Broadly termed 'Dharmam', it provides the guidelines for every one to steer through the current of life, unmindful of the hazards. The rules of Dharmam have been worked out by sages after testing validity over centuries and as such they are applicable for all times, though in the matter of interpretation, there may be variations. Those who follow the Dharmic rules will acquire the strength to resist temptations, tackle problems, without fear and develop the power to remain unconcerned over bouquets and brickbats. As one subjects himself to Dharmam his mind becomes absolutely conditioned to realise that in the cycle of life, he has to meet both good and bad. The character of Yudhishtira in the epic of the Mahabharata portrays this remarkable trait. While in forest for 12 years, he learnt in close association with God-men, how to control senses. He braved all hazards by his fortitude. When the question of asserting for legitimate rights, after his exile came up, he showed flexibility.

The story of Nala to point out how inspite of the vicissitudes, he maintained equanimity by virtue of his respect for the rules of righteousness. He was deprived of his kingdom and had to work as a menial, but ultimately the inherent strength of moral courage won back laurels.

91. Patient striving will fetch Divine bliss

One of the easiest means of securing salvation

(moksha) is to cultivate patience. Anger will lead a person to Hell. Patience will fetch mental peace, help develop humility and ultimately enable one to enjoy divine bliss.

Anger arises out of desire, which, if unfulfilled, will upset a person. That is why desire is always compared to a devil that will not miss an opportunity to take a permanent abode in a human being. Development of detachment, control of the senses and cultivation of contentment are the steps by which this satan can be driven away. Of course, it is easier said than done. It requires extra-ordinary determination and enormous discipline.

Association with objects which kindle desire, should be snapped. So long as water-content is present in sandalwood paste, the fragrance will be slightly less but when it is dry, the scent will reappear in full. Detachment will take a person to the stage where he can remain like a rock that is least affected even by gale. Such a virtuous man will not be swayed by sentiments, nor lured by worldly activities and his mind will be free from rancour.

How conceit, ill-will and unreasonableness promote hatred is illustrated in Mahabharata. Intimacy developed between Lord Krishna's son and Duryodhana's daughter. The enraged Duryodhana kept the culprit captive and refused to release him inspite of Balarama's reconciliation moves. By virtue of the power he wielded, Duryodhana ridiculed the family of Lord Krishna and wanted to adopt retaliatory measures. His anger resulted in his downfall. Balarama reported to Lord Krishna about the adamant attitude of Duryodhana. Confrontation between the two groups became inevitable because of Duryodhana's pride.

92. Zealous guardians of culture and religion

The task of preserving our country's culture and tradition and of fostering spiritual and religious values has been entrusted to women and they have continued to be their zealous guardians. They have been given responsibilities and

of any quarrel or battle was difference of opinion and misunderstanding.

9. No sanction to amend Shastras

The rules under religious laws and moral codes are, in their very nature, in the form of permanent injunctions. They represent the crystallised wisdom of our forefathers. They cannot be subjected to alterations to suit changing climates or personal whims. They may prove irksome during practical application but does not entitle any one, more so a firm believer in the Shastras, to give them a new interpretation or a twist to meet the needs. It is a common tendency among those who have mastered sciences based on Shastras (like astrology) not to disclose facts but to prescribe propitiatory measures to ward off evil influences and incidentally derive pecuniary gains. That there is no sanction to amend Shastras has been proved by Sahadeva, who unmindful of the fact that his expertise was sought by no less a person than his inveterate enemy, rigidly adhered to the directives contained in the Shastras. To ensure success, Duryodhana was advised by Bheeshma to consult Sahadeva for an auspicious time for inaugurating the Kurukshetra war. Known for his integrity, Sahadeva fixed the Amavasya on margasira month, fully conscious that Duryodhana's success would mean his own end. Anticipating the crisis, Yudhishtira pleaded with Lord Krishna for His intervention, who sensing the dangerous consequences, worked out a proper solution, thwarting Duryodhana's attempts. The Lord was full of praise for Sahadeva's upright conduct and respect for tradition.

Some who are claiming themselves as custodians of Dharma, extremely fair and incorruptible, acted quite contrary to what they sermonised. The portrayal of Salya's character in the great epic, Mahabharata, is intended to remind us of the presence of such hypocrites among us. Salya desired that he should be called a true follower of the principles of righteousness. Having joined the feast of Duryo-

dhana, though he was partially not aware of it, as who hosted it, he stick up to righteousness.

95. Justice should be even-handed

Those vested with authority to render justice should never fail to do so, unmindful of any embarrassment that might arise. There should be no room for sentiments. Several such morals are contained in the Mahabharata.

Even as bitter medicine is administered by mixing it with honey, the message in the epic described as the fifth Veda, is preached through interesting stories. The blind king Dhritarashtra should have immediately rebuked his sons when they deliberately caused injury to the Pandavas but he failed in his duty. His conscience pricked him and he underwent mental agony but still affection overpowered reason. Despite listening to two brilliant dissertations on ethic by Vidura and Sanatsujata he did not change.

Besides the 'Vidura Neethi; and 'Sanat Sujateeyam' sage Vyasa has enshrined the song celestial, the Bhagawad Gita, in the Mahabharatam. While translating the Sanskrit text into Telugu, Tikkanna has effectively summarised the verses, giving the essence of the Gita in about 50 verses. Wherever necessary, the poet has elaborated the theme.

There is much significance attached to the Principle of unity in diversity in Tikkanna's translation. He had the synopsis which Nannaya had prepared as the basic charter for his work but which the latter could not accomplish. Tikkanna has displayed the spirit of local patriotism in his work by referring to the glory of the Andhras.

96. The lure of money and women

Even fast friends are known to have fallen out over night and become bitter enemies to the point of swearing not to meet each other any more. It may seem incredible that the relationship between the two, cemented by mutual affec-

tion and sacrifice, could have snapped at all, that too for such a flimsy reason. The same is true of brothers. The human mind is notoriously fickle and none can predict with certainty its behaviour. What can be done is to minimise the chances of misunderstanding by judiciously removing factors that are likely to cause friction. Generally, the cause of disaffection is money or woman. Scriptures speak of two affectionate brothers. Sunda and Upasunda, who quarrelled between themselves over a beautiful damsel, each claiming her hand and met with their end.

Sage Narada suggested that the Pandavas lived with Draupadi for a year, by turn, to avoid any hitch developing among them on her account. Accordingly, the Pandavas imposed on themselves certain rules of conduct, the penalty for defying them being a year's pilgrimage. Faced with a dilemma, Arjuna chose to contravene the injunction and undertake a pilgrimage, rather than stick to it and fail in his duty as a Kshatriya. To him, fulfilling an obligation to his citizen was more important than honouring a commitment involving his personal conduct.

97. Inexorability of Fate

A hymn of Rig Veda vividly portrays the evil which stems out of gambling. Its disastrous consequences are illustrated by the Nala-Damayanti episode in the Mahabharata. Sages refer to the untold sufferings undergone by Emperor Nala only to remind us that no one should feel he has been singled out by God to face crisis.

The urge to play these ruinous games may arise out of the desire for gain, tendency to derive excitement, temptation and the instinct of competition. Even when everything seems to be lost, a sudden change in the fortunes of a person may take place, taking him to the goal of victory, this makes him try his chance till the end. Besides explaining the inherent weakness to take part in the game of dice, the story unfolds the circumstances which compelled Yudhishtira,

the hero of the poem, to play the game. Thereby the plot also highlights the inexorability of fate.

A devotee who remembers Lord Krishna at all times, Yudhishtira failed to seek His views before agreeing to accept the invitation of Duryodhana to Participate in it. Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages and its study strengthens our souls, driving home the futility of hatred and the vanity of ambition. The conduct of the characters in the epic should be judged in the light of the then circumstances and the period during which they flourished. In a court of justice, not always truth emerges triumphant; certain other factors govern the success of a party, one of them being the force of the advocacy. Draupadi argues, when asked to present herself in an august assembly that those who have already lost the game, have no authority to use her as stakes. When she was dragged and when all earthly aid failed, in her utter helplessness, she implored divine succour and it did come from God. Though his possessions were restored to Yudhishtira, yet he was once again tempted to play.

98. The most precious Jewel of women

In scriptural literature there are stories about insects, birds and beasts conversing; their conversations convey profound philosophic truths and spiritual wisdom. In fact, they reflect the way the human mind thinks. One such episode is about the attitude of a woman who seeks information from her spouse. This has been narrated in the Mahabharata only to spotlight women's duties.

When a royal couple were resting, the king suddenly burst into peals of laughter; He was following the dialogue between two ants, as he knew their language. The female insect informed the male how she was about to be abducted by an intruder and how she could resist it and curse him with the power of her chastity. When the queen insisted on the king telling her what passed in his mind, he refused to reveal it as that would cause his death. The adamant queen

preferred to know the secret despite the king's entreaties. The sage who taught him the mantra to study the behaviour of insects had advised him to desert such women.

Draupadi sought to know from Narada how to conduct herself when destiny had made her marry five brothers. Service to her spouses with a smile was the best method, the sage suggested. Should circumstances compel, there was no need for a woman to visit temples or chant mantras but treat her husband as equal to God and revere him. She should protect her chastity as it hangs as a sword held by a thin cord above her head and it might snap at any time. She should preserve this as her crest-jewel. The epic narrates how Arjuna upheld Dharma by voluntarily going on a pilgrimage to atone for the act of disturbing the privacy of his brother and Draupadi, in violation of a code.

99. Vedic utterances have eternal validity

Being the revelations of God, Vedic utterances have eternal validity. They will make men, who learn them and digest their meanings, lead a life of purity. The fundamental lesson they teach is to adhere to truth, never to give it up under any circumstance. Such a step will help to generate courage and face any test. A study of the Vedas will enable them to develop contentment, discard avarice and anger and remain calm. The mastery of the Vedas is achieved only by resorting to their memorisation from a very early age at the feet of a master who will transmit the knowledge orally.

In acquiring worldly knowledge, a person may equip himself well as he gets old but the chances of forgetting what was learnt in the earlier stages of schooling are greater where as the Vedic scholar will remember the very first syllable he was taught. He will have a tremendous memory power. The Vedas also spell out the value of performing religious rites using fire as the medium. The smoke that arises from these rites will help gather dark rain-bearing clouds. The Vedas attach special importance to men getting associated with

pious and virtuous souls and totally eschewing evil company. By being in the midst of God-fearing persons, it will be possible to mould one's character.

In the Mahabharata, an interesting dialogue between Yudhishtira and a Yaksha (incorporeal) touches on several aspects of a man's life. Except the former, his four brothers disobeyed the command of the Yaksha, drank the water of the poisoned pool despite severe warning and fell unconscious. Yudhishtira however agreed to answer the questions raised by the Yaksha 'to the best of my capacity', revealing his humility though he was well-versed in everything.

He related the instance of two parrots—one tended in a hermitage and as such accustomed only to the good words uttered by the sages while the other, brought up in a butcher's house, learning to repeat only rude and uncivil words. This would point out to the necessity of moving only with those who possess an impeccable character and who will always be thinking of God. One will become pious by being at the service of such outstanding men.

100. Devotion, the link between God and man

God sees our actions. Loud prayers cannot deceive Him. To reach Him, we need to be pure-hearted and genuine. The mind should be emptied before it can be filled. We should realise that the entire world has been created by the Almighty and having done so, He takes the responsibilities to protect us. The human beings, among His creations, are privileged to possess the faculty of thinking and arriving at a sane decision. The best among them are those who have elevated themselves to the stage of sincere devotees and who by their living, show that they are the descendants of the Almighty, that they have a mission to fulfil and that they would spread His message.

The characteristic traits of a sincere devotee whom the Lord likes have been spelt out by Him. He will be free

from jealousy hatred and anxiety. Humility, unostentatiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, simplicity, purity, steadfastness and self-control will single out a real devotee from the ordinary. A devotee who has established himself in God bears no ill-will towards any one. He treats everyone with love and compassion. He will see God in every one. Contentment will ever dwell in his heart. He will have no cravings and as such will ever be cheerful. Pure devotion acts as the eternal link between God-head and the impeccable soul. Even the commonest of devotional service will not go in vain nor is there any loss in merely attempting it, for even a little of it will deliver the devotee from the trammels of the world.

God's declaration about a devotee's nature as spelt out in the Mahabharata. He will be indifferent to mundane opposites, will remain harmonised, firm and calm and be satisfied with whatever comes his way. 'Such a person is dear to me'. Since his mind is always fixed on the left, he will not be swayed by the blind forces of attraction or repulsion. Devotion is no mere emotional rapture to such a person. When his heart becomes healthy and guileless, he will be close to God and gain spiritual vision. God lives within such people.

101. Law of Dharma makes no distinction

The visible world passes away from our sight and a certain change takes place in the process of evolution. Man is subjected to birth and decay, but the soul is eternal. This makes a man greater than all creations of God. Gifted with soul, one has to think of the Almighty in one's vicissitudes of life.

The noblest among the characters of the Mahabharata was Bheeshma, who, living on a bed of arrows, gave to the world, the message of wisdom, vividly spelling out the methods to cross the ocean of birth and death. When Lord Krishna met Bheeshma, he was in tears. The Lord thought of

showering his compassion on him and asked him to solicit any boon. Bheeshma was still in tears. The Lord even offered to recreate any one among the dead in the Kurukshetra war.

Bheeshma just smiled and asked the Lord to clear a doubt of his. 'Why should the Pandavas who have always been with you, who have followed your advice and dedicated everything to you; be made to undergo indescribable agony in the forest for 13 years and why have you chosen not to prevent this catastrophe (of war)' ? he asked. Lord Krishna's reply was that law of Dharma made no distinction between His friend and foe. Everyone had to pay the price for his sin. Such ennobling ideas portrayed in the immortal scriptural literature, influenced the national character down the ages. Even as he was dying, the grandsire's advice to the haughty Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas was not heeded.

From time immemorial, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have been expounded to render guidance to those who want to achieve success in worldly activities.

102 Righteousness must be upheld at all costs

The law of nature may not spare any one from grief. But some due to their spiritual practices, might gain moral strength to withstand difficulties. Invariably, people collapse, unable to bear the suffering and may feel that they have been particularly singled out for punishment by God. They may also think that there is none more unfortunate than they. Problems will remain so long as mankind exists and men should develop the fortitude to bear the agony, placing reliance on God. Several episodes have been incorporated in scriptural literature to highlight the ordeals of some of the characters and their survival. The story of Nala is one of them.

An emperor turned a pauper due to his defeat in the

game of dice. Nala's life provides a warning about the disastrous consequences of gambling. Secondly even when he underwent indescribable misery, he did not lose his morale. He upheld the rules of Dharma even during critical days. When the hero of Mahabharata, despite his rectitude, was disheartened at the successive knocks of misfortune, sages around him consoled him and one of them narrated the rare courage displayed by Nala and how adherence to truth and justice enabled him to get back his lost position.

To be friendly with God is one of the nine modes of devotion. This was exemplified by Arjuna. For the extraordinary valour he showed, Arjuna was honoured in the world of celestials, where he was told that the law of Dharma followed by mankind would not be applicable to them. But Arjuna stood firm and refused to violate it. Wherever a person may live, he has to be faithful to the rules of righteous conduct prescribed for him. Arjuna laid emphasis on the need to maintain one's character at any cost.

103. Ultimate triumph of justice

Instances of periodic flagrant and unabashed violation of the law of righteousness by some, have made those wedded to justice and truth remain dazed and wonder whether it will be worthwhile to live amidst such circumstances. They may feel whether there will be any possibility of Dharma regaining its status. But events have proved that virtue will never perish though there may be signs of its Warning. Ultimately Dharma is bound to emerge triumphant and people who have suffered ignominy and put to severe hardship coming out Victorious. It all depends on the work of destiny. When Bheema rose in anger at the insult shown to Draupadi in a public assembly, Arjuna, who should have been equally provoked, calmed him, pointing out that the tumult by unscrupulous elements and their domination would always be short-lived. Hence they (the Pandavas) should never be pessimistic as fate had chosen them as players in its drama.

(the Mahabharata) and hence they should perform it properly and show to posterity that honesty would always stand vindicated. But when Adharma raised its head, citizens remained isolated pleading helplessness to curb it.

Yudhishtira, a replica of righteousness, who had certainly known the ruinous consequences of gambling, consented to play the game of dice with Duryodhana, demonstrated the impact of destiny. But even he, as he started playing, became conscious of his position and wealth and with a tinge of vanity asked his opponent whether he could match the amount or property that he would be prepared to stake. Poet Bharati, who wrote the 'Panchali Sapatham' based on Vyasa, was critical of Yudhishtira, whose action was like that of priest himself stealing the icon of the temple or the watchman looting the property of the house he was to watch.

104. Magnificence of Bheeshma's Sacrifice

In scriptural history there has been no reference to any character having conquered lust. On the other hand, several men, some even possessing extra ordinary spiritual powers, have been portrayed as yielding to its demoniac influence. But the unique distinction of having totally abjured carnal cravings and remained a celibate throughout his life goes to Bheeshma in the Mahabharata. It is not easy for a person in affluent circumstances or holding a position, particularly a youth, to give up desire for sex and forego marital relationship. A situation arose when Bheeshma resolutely stuck to a decision to remain unmarried, a sacrifice no one could dream of just to enable his father re-marry. He had the option to refuse to do so but he wanted his father to derive pleasure. He refused to swerve from this grim determination, even at the cost of incurring the displeasure and wrath of his preceptor, who made him an expert warrior. On the death of his mother, his father sought the hands of a bewitching woman but her parents insisted that only the children born to her should succeed to the kingdom. This would mean that neither Bheeshma nor his wards could ascend the

throne at any time, inspite of their legitimate right. Bheeshma himself arranged the marriage of his father with the woman of his choice, making in the process, a sacrifice that has no parallel so far.

The Mahabharata had its genesis from a woman who presented herself, before an august assembly, scantily dressed, giving a vulgar display of her physical frame and charm and thereby upset the mental balance of Varuna. They were cursed to live for some time in the world and were born as Santhanu-couple to whom, Bheeshma was born. Bheeshma upheld the prestige of Lunar dynasty by his upright conduct.

105. Path of morality sure way to realise God

The term 'Dharmam' cannot be fully and adequately defined, its vista being vast. It adumbrates several principles governing the problems of life but broadly it represents the power to sustain the world and human actions. By adhering to the law of righteousness and Morality, it is possible for a person to realise God. But the observances of the laws will naturally involve extremely rigid discipline. At times, a person may be caught on the horns of a dilemma, because an act of his viewed from one angle may seem to be absolutely correct but from another facet, it may appear faulty. Mahabharat presents Yudhishtira, the key figure as a symbol of nobility, honesty, piety, passionless judgement, strict veracity, unswerving rectitude, patience, tolerance and justice. Any one in his place would have broken down totally by the impact of the series of terrible blows but he faced them undeterred.

The epic however points out that even persons like him who had reached Himalayan heights, are apt to blunder as no human being can escape without committing some mistake. Yudhishtira's weakness was to gamble and unmindful of the stern warning given by many, about the consequences, he played a game of dice and lost his entire property. But he

remained unperturbed and the only explanation he gave was his anxiety not to refuse an invitation from his cousins lest they should feel unhappy. The epic touched another important aspect—the significance of philanthropy. Time was when a specified percentage of a man's income was to be apportioned for charity.

Through the character of Karna, Vyasa showed how he had donated without any hesitation, at any time, to any one. The general tendency would be to become more miserly as one acquired greater wealth. God put Karna to test when he was about to lay down his life but even then he surrendered what was sought, smilingly and willingly.

106. A virtuous guest deserves worship

Among the great Hindu traditions, honouring a chance guest, who is virtuous and holy and who expects nothing but the host's warm affection during his visit, is considered a noble act. Such a visitor is to be treated with utmost reverence and looked upon as a manifestation of God. Turning him away without offering food and worshipping him, may nullify the host's gains from pious deeds.

The Mahabharata has a parable :—

Once there was acute famine, when a family of four managed to obtain with extreme difficulty a little corn flour. As they were about to partake of it, a visitor sought alms and the father, mother, son and daughter-in-law, one after another, willingly gave him their share. The satisfied guest left but the family starved.

The mongoose rolled itself on the floor where the tiny particles of the flour were scattered. Wherever the flour particles stuck to the animal's body, its colour turned golden. "I am still in search of persons who make similar sacrifices, as I want to have my body's colour changed uniformly into bright yellow", the mongoose said, to highlight the impor-

tance of serving and deserving any needy guests. (Athithi Devo Bhava)

Nachiketa who waited at the doorstep of Yama for three nights, was treated as a rare visitor and extended due courtesy. Yama agreed to grant him three boons. The first request of the young boy was that he should be with his father again. He is different from others who will normally seek material comforts, should God appear before them. From this emerges the Hindu concept of "Swarga". It is but a temporary shelter for good men to enjoy the fruits of their actions of piety so long as they last and they have to return to the world.

107. One should be sincere in performing duty

Each section of society has to perform its duties honestly and sincerely if there should be harmony, peace and progress. The Shastras lay great emphasis on adherence to one's "Swadharma", which means performance of duties that have fallen to one's lot. The individual thereby not only benefits himself but serves society as well. The word "Dharma" in sanskrit connotes the entire gamut of one's duties both secular and religious.

The familiar excuse being trotted out by the "busy" modern man is that there is hardly any time for performance of various religious rites enjoined on the householder by the Shastras. Again, some of the ceremonies are expensive too. If only a person cares to review his daily activities from the time he gets up from the bed in the morning till he retires in the night, he cannot but realise how much time he has been wasting in idle gossip and useless trivialities. It cannot escape his notice that he has been able to raise the needed resources for various pleasures and different types of avoidable wasteful expenditure. The fact of the matter is that while the modern man is dead earnest and serious about acquiring different things to enjoy the pleasures of life, he woefully lacks earnestness in matters relating to Dharma, in its turn, will protect a person who cares for it.

The great law-giver, Manu, had said women deserved to be treated with respect and honour if God were to be pleased. In Mahabharata, Vidura explained to Dhritarashtra all about Dharma and pleaded with the doting blind father that the Pandavas should be given their share of the kingdom.

108. None can conquer destiny

Destiny is all powerful and even the tallest among men have to submit to it. None can prove a match and play tricks with it. There is a familiar saying in Tamil which is sought to convey the idea that fate can be conquered by intelligence. It is a superficial interpretation to tickle man's ego. The real import is that those who have attained spiritual enlightenment remain unaffected when overtaken by adversity. Even in their case, destiny does work.

When evil days are round the corner, even the most virtuous commit unrighteous acts. They are egged on to do so in spite of themselves. Otherwise how can one explain Yudhishtira's ready acceptance for game of dice and his staking everything and losing not only his kingdom but his dear brothers and wife. No doubt he is described as one with weakness for that game and the wily Shakuni, Duryodhana's evil genius, inveigled him into it. It was strange that Yudhishtira who was over cautious to be on amicable terms with everyone particularly his cousins following Sage Vyasa's warning of large-scale destruction of the Kshatriya race, took this step which culminated in the savage Kurukshetra war.

Duryodhana was burning with jealousy on seeing the wealth and glory of the Pandava princes when he witnessed the Raja Suya Yajnam (Sacrifice) performed by Yudhishtira. Jealousy is one of the worst traits leading to man's downfall as it breeds hatred and anger. One possessed by these base passions, would stoop to commit any heinous act. Duryodhana persisted in his evil designs despite advice & warnings

by others and he invited doom. His life should serve as a grim warning to others.

109. In faith lies success in the battle of life

The Mahabharata presents the two sides of life, showing the influences which cluster round man's younger days and later stages—attracting some to piety and religion and luring others to lust and impropriety. God and Satan are portrayed in the contending characters of the drama. The theme centres round the glorious examples of able administrators, the Dharma followed by Sages and saints and the avidity with which the people of the past upheld the law of virtue. The purpose was to enable succeeding generations to emulate their example and thereby gain access to God's kingdom.

Personal valour, accumulation of unlimited wealth and care of the body pale into insignificance before nobility, integrity and industry. The former were inherent in the Kauravas while the latter were deeply embedded among the Pandavas. The soul and the spirit functioned alike in Yudhishtira. Neither a mighty army nor vast treasures were the bulwarks of a nation. But in a true friend like Vidura & a counsel like Lord Krishna whom one can neither command nor force nor purchase through gold but whose advice can only be secured by one's own good conduct and by an open demonstration of faith, lies success in the battle of life.

The father of the Kauravas, Dhritarashtra, "blind" with attachment towards his sons, and ambitious that they should amass material gains, allowed them to violate the established conventions and remained silent when they perpetrated crimes on the Pandavas. Yudhishtira was able to employ his God-given mental faculties properly. His mind was trained and hence he could use his powers easily, quickly and advantageously. He learnt everything not only by his

personal experience but from others as well. He understood the mystery behind the great design of the Almighty.

110. Kunti's devotion to Krishna

Most people offer prayers and worship in temples essentially to plead with God to protect them from perils, to enable them overcome problems and to ensure that they meet with success in their endeavours and thereby prosper. But it is also a common tendency to conveniently forget all about God once the obstacles are cleared and when a good position is secured. Often people fail to repay their debt of gratitude to the Almighty who has provided them with a permanent job and an assured future. When difficulties are thrown in their path, they again look upon God to rescue them.

The Mahabharata cites the classic example of a great woman devotee who urged the Almighty to keep her perpetually immersed in grief as that alone would make her to cling to his feet, seek solace and compel Him to extend His grace. This was devotion—extra ordinary where a person desired to enjoy bliss not through resorting to other methods but by witnessing the vision of God.

Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, showered her praise on Lord Krishna for the manner in which He had protected them from dangerous situations. She was perfectly aware that He was God in human form. Men like Duryodhana branded Sri Krishna as a sorcerer and His Divine acts as were magic. The desire and other wicked traits in them acted as a veil preventing them from identifying and acknowledging His Supreme powers but mistaking Him for a coward chief. These haughty men were suitably punished for their insolence. Where as the Pandavas who revered Him and followed His guidance were richly rewarded. When as a last revengeful act, Ashwathama tried to kill the lone successor of the Pandavas (in the womb of their daughter-in-law) it was Sri Krishna who guarded the woman and made the child survive.

111. Selfless service has its reward

One should wholeheartedly engage oneself in the task that has fallen to one's lot. While going about in all sincerity and seriousness, he should not bother himself about the outcome, leaving it to God's will. This attitude enables one to discharge one's duties most efficiently. A truly great person is happy when his actions benefit others, That itself is the reward.

The river carries plentiful water. It derives no benefit. It only benefits others. The tree gives fruits and flowers, only to others. Watching these phenomena, those keen on self-improvement, gradually shed their selfishness and start practising selflessness in their actions. The joy in selfless service is to be experienced to be believed.

It hardly matters what job one does, but it matters much how one goes about it. No job as such is superior or inferior. Duties performed in a selfless manner are more than suitably rewarded by God. The entire community benefits because of them. The Pandava princes during their stay incognito in virata kingdom had to do what might be considered mean jobs. With their minds God-centred, they performed their duties. There were copious rains and there was marked improvement in the wealth and prosperity of the king and there was marked improvement in the wealth and prosperity of the king and his subjects in that kingdom.

112. Magnanimity towards poor

By nature and temperament, a person may always be calm and composed but yet he will feel deeply distressed and hurt if he is reminded of his poverty. No doubt, wealth can be earned by any one, by hardwork and individual efforts. But they alone will not suffice. An element of luck as well as destiny's role are involved. Scriptures however advise the rich on how to utilise their acquisitions to earn the praise of all. It is also pointed out that no man should deride an-

other because of his indigent circumstances, for he may have acquired enormous knowledge but been denied money. Wisdom and riches are two entirely different factors and there is no link between them. The Mahabharata illustrates this even in the initial chapters.

A prince and a poor young man were classmates and the latter helped the former in his studies. In return, the prince promised to grant his friend all comforts when he assumed the kingship. He did ascend the throne but out of conceit developed through power. He refused even to recognise his playmate when the latter approached him for a very small favour. The king turned him away because he was poor. Provoked by his Laughtiness and stunned by his ingratitude, the scholar, who had the distinction of having mastered not only the four Vedas but also gained expertise in archery, vowed to take his revenge. While Vedic study should have made him absolutely mellowed, yet the knowledge of Dhanur Veda made his palm itch to display his talent. This was the background of Drona, the illustrious master for both the Kauravas and the Pandawas.

Drona not only proudly acknowledged Arjuna as the best among his students but also claimed that none could match him. When Karna readied himself to meet the challenge, he was told that a prince could be opposed only by another of his category. It was then that Duryodhana instantaneously made him the ruler of a State, gave him status and recognition, for which Karna remained indebted till his end.

113. Man should turn a child to be near God

The Shastras repeatedly exhort man to beware of his internal foes like jealousy and hatred which, if not curbed and controlled, will lead to his ruin. One should gradually free himself from their stranglehold through regular spiritual exercises like worship and meditation. Noble qualities like love of others and being charitable and kind take a person

nearer God while violent passions like anger and hatred take him farther away. It was the all-absorbing love of the innocent cowherds and Gopikas that compelled Sri Krishna, the supreme to be with them. The Lord, whom the scriptures describe as beyond thought and perception. Whom the saints and yogis struggled hard to reach, was within the easy reach of the unlettered, rustic cowherds with whom He played. Man should grow into childhood, said a great philosopher since anger, jealousy and hatred are alien to the child. A man possessed by such emotional outbursts loses control over his faculties. Often his mind becomes warped and hence he does not see things aright. Sisupala was a classic example of this in the Mahabharata.

Sisupala showered abuse on Sri Krishna in the great assembly of saints, kings and the learned on the occasion of Yudhishtira's Rajasooya Yajna. Seething with rage, he used the meanest language against the Lord when Bheeshma, Sage Vyasa and other pious men had unanimously decided that Sri Krishna deserved the first honours. Those great personages extolled Sri Krishna and His great attributes. While Sisupala invited his end by his unrestrained outburst.

114. The seed of Divinity

The compassion that God showers on men is profuse and He does not allow them to be diserved from Him. People may disobey Him, may show reluctance to approach Him, commit misdeeds and may roll down to dismal depths but God is ever ready to arrest their fall. One of the Hindu traditions has it that the worhippable form the idol contains the seed of all Divinity. The consecrated idol is reckoned as the visible version of God. Apostles have derived immense delight in admiring the bewitching images enshrined in temples and some of them have even preferred to stay in the world for ever paying constant obeisance to them.

The presence of these idols serves as a lamp that illumines a dark room. Worshipping them will kindle the devo-

tional fervour in men who are in search of a source of encouragement and inspiration. The inimitable traits of God like total forgiveness, mercy, easy accessibility and amiability cannot be appreciated in His kingdom since there is no opportunity to display them, as all those who reside there are pure and absolutely dedicated.

His other forms are compared to water in the sub-soil or hidden in clouds or flowing in turbulent rivers and which cannot fetch relief to a man having hiccups and who wants a sip immediately. The idols serve as the reservoir from which any one can draw his requirement. You may refer to Lord Krishna's assistance to the Pandavas and the self-imposed punishment Arjuna took upon himself for having violated a code, by undertaking a pilgrimage to various shrines and bathing in holy rivers.

115. God always protects the Virtuous

The first of the three main categories of human beings are the inherently pious, gentle and righteous, whose only aim in life is to do good to others. They just cannot harm others and another soul and the very thought of injuring the sentiments of any one will be anathema to them. Yudhishthira and Vidura are typical example of this kind as projected in the Mahabharata.

The second type consists of those who are born noble but circumstances make them join the wicked elements. They are unable to check the misdeeds of their associates, for reasons beyond analysis. Bheeshma and Drona represent this group. In the third classification falls Duryodhana, the incarnation of evil. His only task was to see that his adversaries did not prosper.

The entire emphasis of the epic is on the development of character to stand fearless and to depend only on God,

unmindful of the grief one may be made to experience. The episodes describe the eternal battle between the divine and diabolic men. To the virtuous, God always extends His protection as he has unequivocally declared his resolve to stand by those who surrender to Him. Adversity makes a person while luxury destroys him.

Draupadi's plight was pitiable when she was dragged to public assembly by a group of unscrupulous men. They took a vicarious delight in humiliating her stirring appeal to God met with immediate response. Lord Krishna saved her honour and punished the culprits.

116. A Golden rule on charity

Man is a mixture of good and evil. In some cases the latter predominates. But even if there is a single virtue, it is bound to offset many bad traits. The scriptures command a person to show generosity to the deserving. 'Never refuse to give to a noble cause if you can. But never seek anything from others if you can avoid it', is the golden rule laid down. Karna in Mahabharata, stands as the greatest giver and remains as the most charitable person. He was an inveterate enemy of the Pandavas and in collusion with the Kauravas, he resorted to various subterfuges to bring about their down fall. He prompted Duryodhana to commit wile and vulgar deeds and counselled Dussasana to disrobe Draupadi in the public. In spite of these evil propensities, he had one redeeming trait—he was liberal in giving donations, at any time, to any one, without any reservations. He was generous even to God and gave away his "punya" knowing that his death was certain.

Karna's loyalty to his benefactor was supreme. Even the offer of a kingdom and royal patronage could not tempt him. Witnessing Duryodhana's anxiety to win the war at any cost, Karna, who assumed the command, felt the need

for a charioteer, who could match Lord Krishna. His choice was Salya, who had to be coaxed, as he favoured the Pandavas. To prove that to save one's skin, a person known for his arrogance and placed in a high position would not mind bending on his knees, Duryodhana approached Salya, tickled his vanity and made him accept the task. Karna differed violently with Salya, yet fought ferociously and was about to kill Arjuna by aiming the serpent dart when Lord Krishna saved His devotee by a timely move. Mahabharata points out that God's descent upon the world is to help man's ascent to heaven.

117. The intellect should not be misused

The extra ordinary gift of God to man—the intellect, should be used only for constructive purposes, particularly, “realising” the Supreme Being, who has endowed him with such a precious power to discriminate between good and evil. If however, some imagine that with this rare faculty instead of trying to comprehend the traits of the Almighty, they can control that very authority or denigrate Him or subject Him to ridicule, they will be sadly mistaken.

Scriptural literature repeatedly stresses this theme—man's utter inability to outwit God and that if he violates the law of Dharma he will be punished and that he should quell the demoniac qualities within him which frequently raise their heads. Characters such as Hiranyakashipu, who believed he was cleverer than God, have been quelled. Duryodhana was yet another such character. Pandavas displayed their virtue by informing their enemies, the Kauravas in the war about the measures they were adopting to punish the powerful Jayadratha, but Duryodhana, presuming he was more intelligent, kept him indoors. But Lord Krishna, by a ruse, brought him out of his hideout and asked Arjuna to chop off his head. The head fell into the hands of Jayadratha's father, who was equally foolish to have obtained a boon

that any one in whose hands his son's head fell, would die instantaneously. Unfortunately, while in meditation, the severed head landed in his own hands, and thus both father and son were wiped out at one stroke.

Another mighty character in the Mahabharata is Drona who mastered the Vedas, which spell out philosophic tenets and also that branch which made him a master in the art of archery. His duty should have been to confine himself to the task of propagating the Lord's message but he relied on his physical prowess, contrary to the established tradition. He had to ultimately regret his choice of archery in preference to Vedanta. The result was, his son, acknowledged as highly matured even while young, at a later stage, committed the most brutal act and grave sin of killing the innocent children of the Pandavas.

118. The truly great never look down on the weak

It is quite common to notice the intelligent ridiculing the dull-witted, the brave despising the cowardly and the rich looking down on the poor. But the truly great do not behave that way. They do not look down on others inferior to them in knowledge, status, mental qualities or valour. On the other hand, they do their best to help them out of their weaknesses. They infuse courage and confidence, cheer them up and spur them on to perform worthy acts.

The episode of prince Uttara in the Mahabharata brings out this trait in the great warrior, Arjuna. The Prince of the Virata kingdom was stricken with panic on seeing the Kaurava army led by the mighty Dronacharya, Bheeshma and others. Arjuna, who was disguised as Brihannala, a eunuch and acted as the charioteer, stopped the fleeing prince from the battle field, put courage into his weak heart and volunteered to fight and win the battle for him. Arjuna, a great soul and a true hero, behaved that way. The blessings of the Acharya are necessary for success in any endeavour.

Arjuna knew it only too well. Accordingly, he sought the blessings of his Guru, Dronacharya, before starting the battle.

119. Prosperity where the righteous live

Our scriptures emphasise the glory of Dharma and the need for every one to adhere to it. Men of noble character always tread the path of Dharma, whatever be the challenges. They have unwavering faith in the ultimate triumph of good over evil and God never lets down these exemplars of virtue. Our epics and puranas are full of episodes conveying this message.

Dharma is a comprehensive and all-inclusive code of conduct or law of living. In the Yakshaprasna episode in the Mahabharata, it is mentioned that Dharma protects the person who protects it. This truth is expressed in a moving scene in the epic. When the insidious Duryodhana, chief of the Kauravas, sought the blessing of his mother, Gandhari, on the eve of his departure for battle with the virtuous Pandavas, the noble woman said "Where there is Dharma, there is victory".

There will be prosperity where righteous people live—the Gods will shower the blessing in the form of rain, rich harvests, etc. In fact, Duryodhana was told he could identify the place where the Pandavas lived incognito by using this indicator. Righteous people do not stray from the path of Dharma even under adversity. They are steadfast in their adherence to it and would rather suffer the worst indignities and hardship than compromise. Satya (Truth) is an important component of Dharma. God is the only life line for people who tread the path of Dharma. The Pandavas, warriors of extra-ordinary prowess, underwent the worst sufferings along with Draupadi and Sri Krishna stood by them in all their trials and tribulations.

120. Sorrow and happiness integral parts

In the scheme devised by God, sorrow & happiness are integral parts. Man, however, may not remember the supreme Being, who has given him all comforts and is depressed, when he undergoes sufferings. A moment's reflection will make him realise that desire leads to attachment, failure to possess. What he wants causes frustration and disappointment makes him angry which destroys his power of discernment, resulting in confused thinking and his ultimate destruction. No man should represent his grief to any one except God. If he submits plaint to the supreme Being, he can get rid of his problems.

It is in this context that man should know not only how to live in this world but how to leave when the call comes, realising that every birth has a death and the body must perish one day. No one knows when the end will come but he should face it cheerfully. Even as a person who wants to taste the delicious jack fruit has to peel off the skin with great care and effort. Everyone should prepare himself to reach God's kingdom, shedding his mortal coil. Death is indeed a friend and God's gift to relieve man of his distress.

In Kathopanishad, the Lord of death provides an elaborate account of "what lies after death" in reply to the query of the adamant young Nachiketa. The fear of death lurks in us because we forget that the body is perishable. The Bhagawatham illustrates how an emperor who committed a grievous mistake, bore a curse and took steps to realise God during the brief period of a week when he was ordained to die. By curbing worldly desires, by avoiding attachment and by being of good cheer man can live happily, unmindful of the sorrows. A saint's verse wondering why people should shed tears when a man dies, will serve as an answer to man's constant fear of death. In the process of evolution, the everlasting soul casts off the body and inanimate object,

takes the form of a tree or a creeper, then a bird or a beast and turns a man, finally emerging as a Superman. God's words epitomising the Mahabharata serve as a touchstone for the dichotomy of the human being.

EPILOGUE

Sri Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord, had asked the Gods to be born in the world of men to help Him in His work : the destruction of evil and the establishment of Dharma. Indra, Vayu, Dharma and the Ashwini twins were on the earth for a time. The earth was to be cleansed of the poisons which were choking her. The earth was made pure because these Gods had walked on it. The seed of Dharma had been planted in the soil which was prepared by the blood of the noblest of men. The purpose of their birth had been served. They had to return to heaven once more. The Pandavas were absorbed into the Gods who were their fathers. The world is richer for the few years of glory that was hers when Sri Krishna walked on it. The story of the lives of the Pandavas has become immortal. So long as the world lives, so long as the Sun and the Moon move in their orbits, so long as there is a spark of goodness in the heart of man, the story of the Pandavas will be read in the world of men.

S. NARAYANA RAO



The Author & his wife, Smt. S. Shakuntala Devi

The Author, Shri S. Narayana Rao, was born at Satyavaram Village, Mandal, Dist. Mahabubnagar, A. P., on 8th, Nov. 1928, A. D. He was the second son of Sri S. Raghavender Rao. He lost his parents in his childhood only. He passed his H.S.C. Exam., in 1947. After police action he passed his inter in 1949 and B.A. in 1951. He passed his M.A. with Sociology in 1957 and M.A. Urdu in 1961 and B. Ed. in 1968, from the Osmania-University, Hyderabad. For 17 years, he worked as Head Master in Z. P. Schools and for 17 years, he worked as Lecturer and Head of the Department, in different Degree Colleges. Finally, he retired from service in Nov. 1986.

“He is well accustomed with Telugu, English, Hindi, Urdu and Kannada language and has a thorough knowledge of them. He is married to the eldest daughter of Late Sri Pallerla Hanumanth Rao, Deputy Minister and M.P. of A.P. His masterpiece in Urdu, ‘Ramayana for the Modern World’ was published in 1980 with the TTD aid. It brought to him great honours and prizes from different Sahitya Academies. The Govt. of India awarded to him a special prize on this. Great persons, scholars and poets praised this book very much. In 1987, his second book ‘Sublime Thoughts on Sri-mad Maha Bhagawatham’ in English was published with the TTD aid. Here, he has acquainted the readers with some of the sublime eternal truths and morals drawn from this great treasure-house of such truths. It was really a great and useful attempt to understand this great work to some

extent. Being a college teacher for 17 years, he has got rich experience and the required capacity to cull out the best and present them to the readers in a fitting manner and he has done quite well here. In 1988, his book "Miracles of Saint Vijaya Dasa" in English was published by the TTD aid. It was a masterly treatise on the Haridasa movement and the saint. A very good and accurate translation of many songs of Haridasa from Kannada to English has been given here by the author and quoted in this book properly. His desire and plan to publish such other books on other eminent Haridasas will certainly be fulfilled by the God. Eminent scholars and dignitaries have appreciated it. His interest and scholarship in the Haridasa literature is very deep and praiseworthy. It is a very good example of Samskara. He has immense love and devotion and interest in Dwaita Philosophy. In 1989, he has himself published with great devotion, a short biography and Miracles of his guruji. Late Shri A. Venkat Ramaniah Garu who was a great Sadaka and eminent founder of Sri Chamundeswari Devi's Temple at Chitkul, in Medak Dist. In 1990, his book "A Short biography of Sri Dattatreya Swami, in Telugu, was published with the TTD aid. It includes the "Guru Geeta Saramu" also and is very useful for the devotees for their daily recitation. In 1991, his another masterpiece book "Essentials of the Bhagawatham" in English, is being published by himself. He has culled out its essential truths and teachings in excellent manner. He has very earnestly taken up to the study of Madhwa philosophy and the Bhagawatham. His earnest devotion, spirit of industry, has earned him great scholarship in Puranic literature. This work is really commendable. It is of high standard. It is really praiseworthy. He has published a few Dharmic books, which have brought to him great name, fame, popularity, praise from high dignitaries and numerous prizes. The TTD., the Govt. of India, the different literary academies have already honoured him by prizes and certificates on his different religious books. Some eminent Books are to be published by him soon. I wish the author all the success in his scholarly endeavour and let many more works come through his pen and enrich the world.

Dr. K. M Krishna Rao, M.A., Ph.D;

(Retd.) Professor;

(from his "Foreword")

